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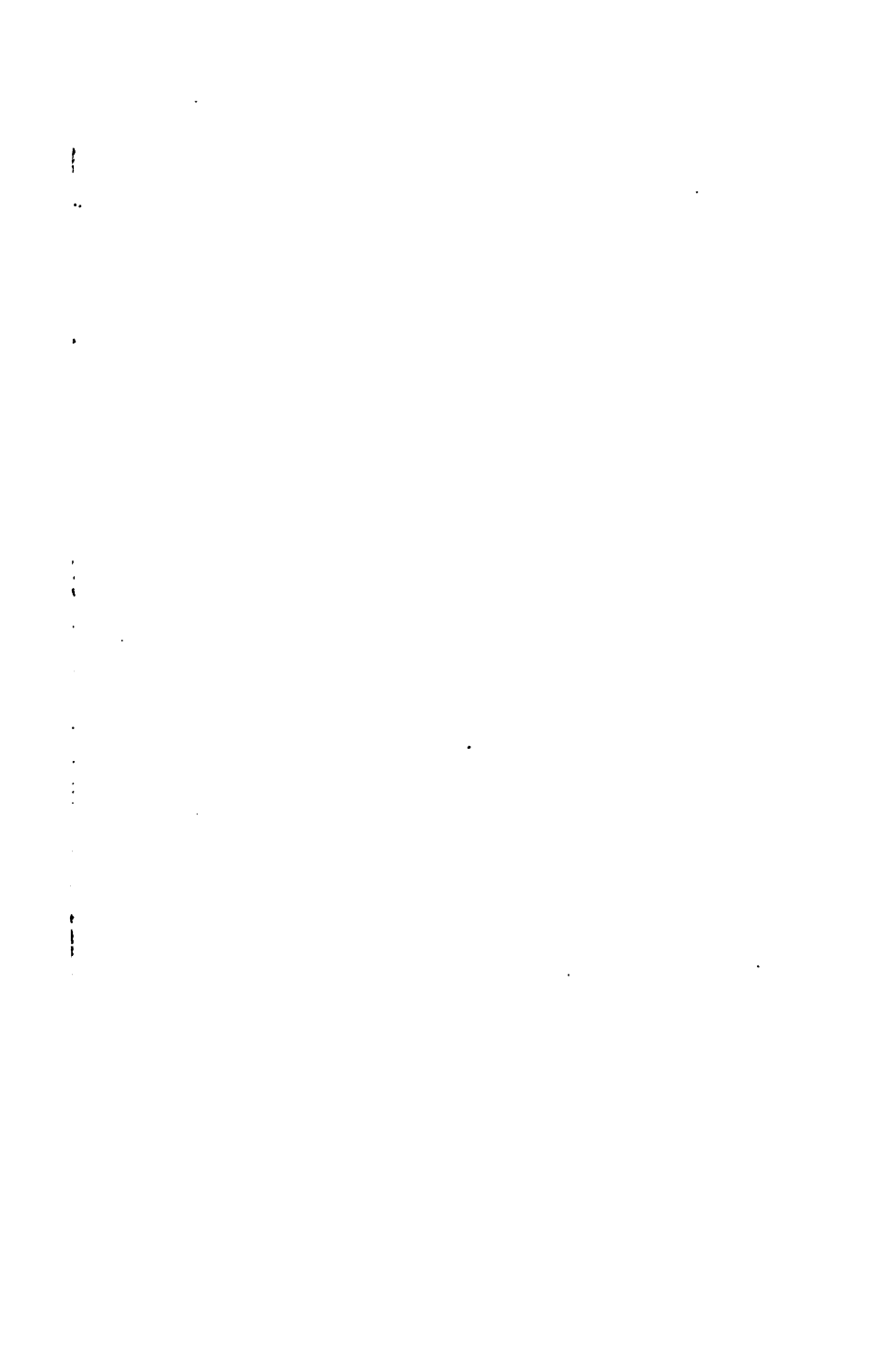
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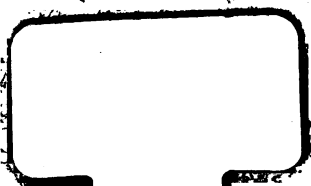
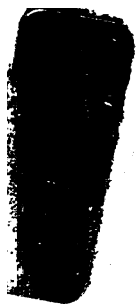
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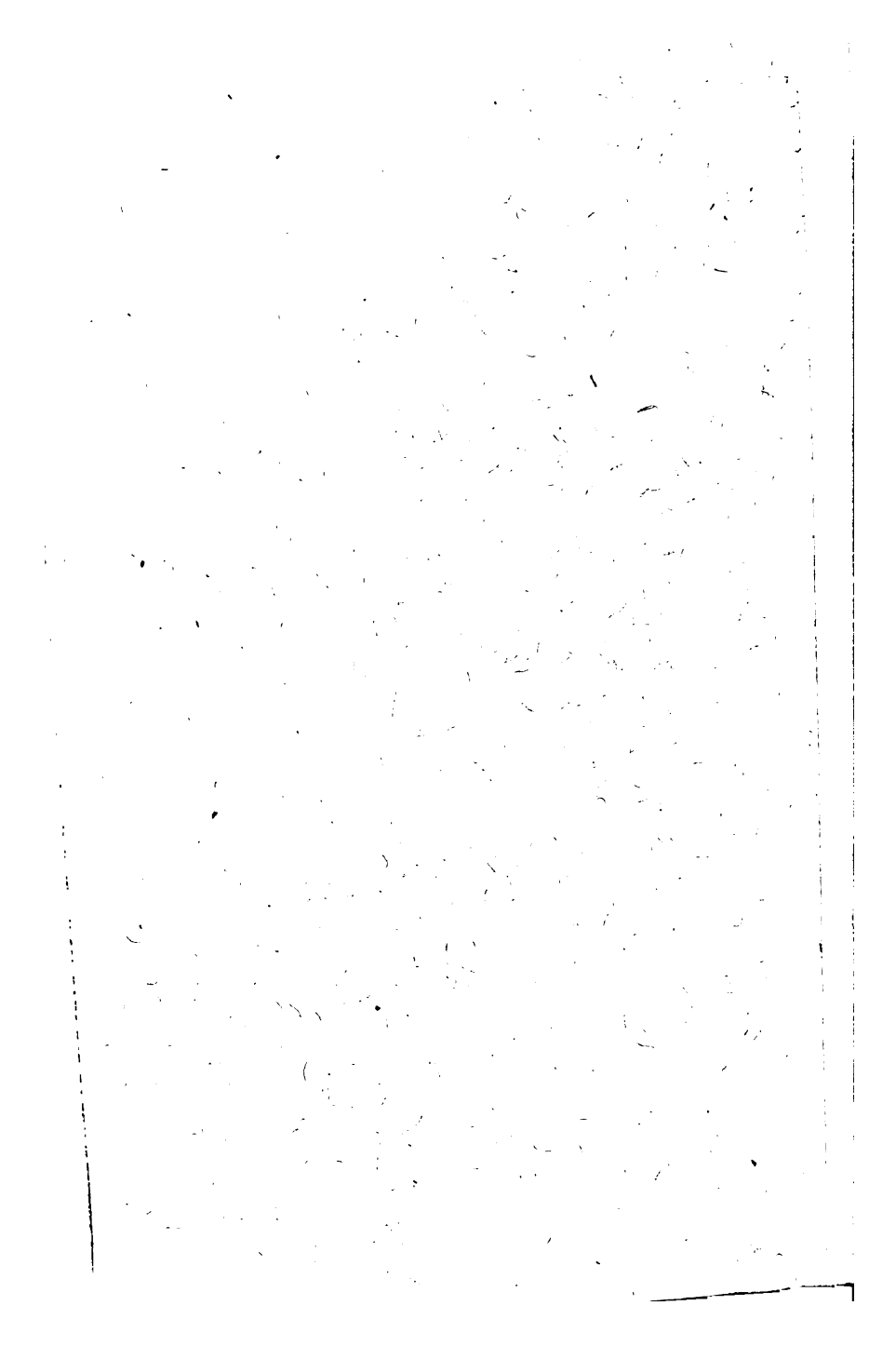
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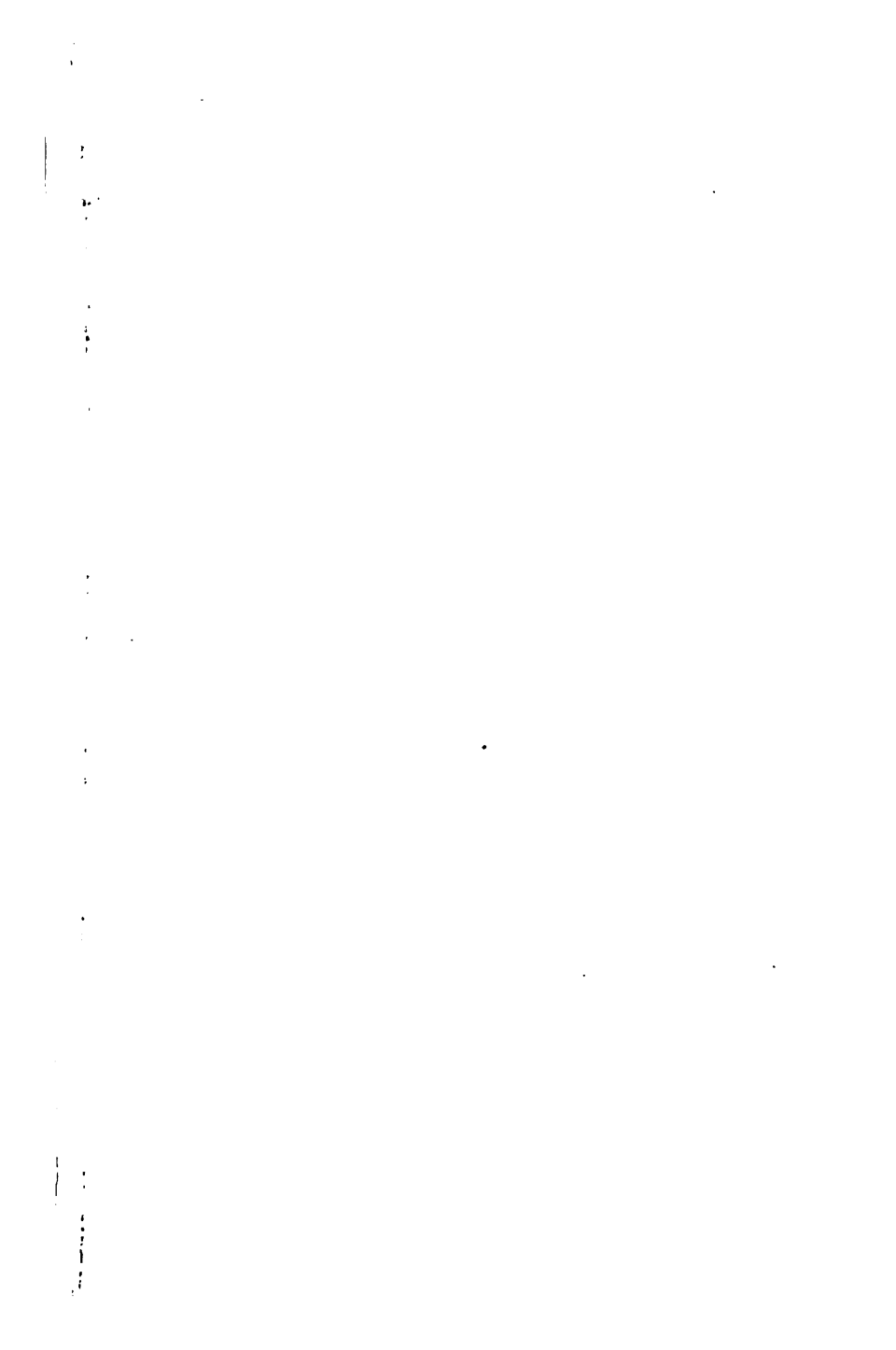
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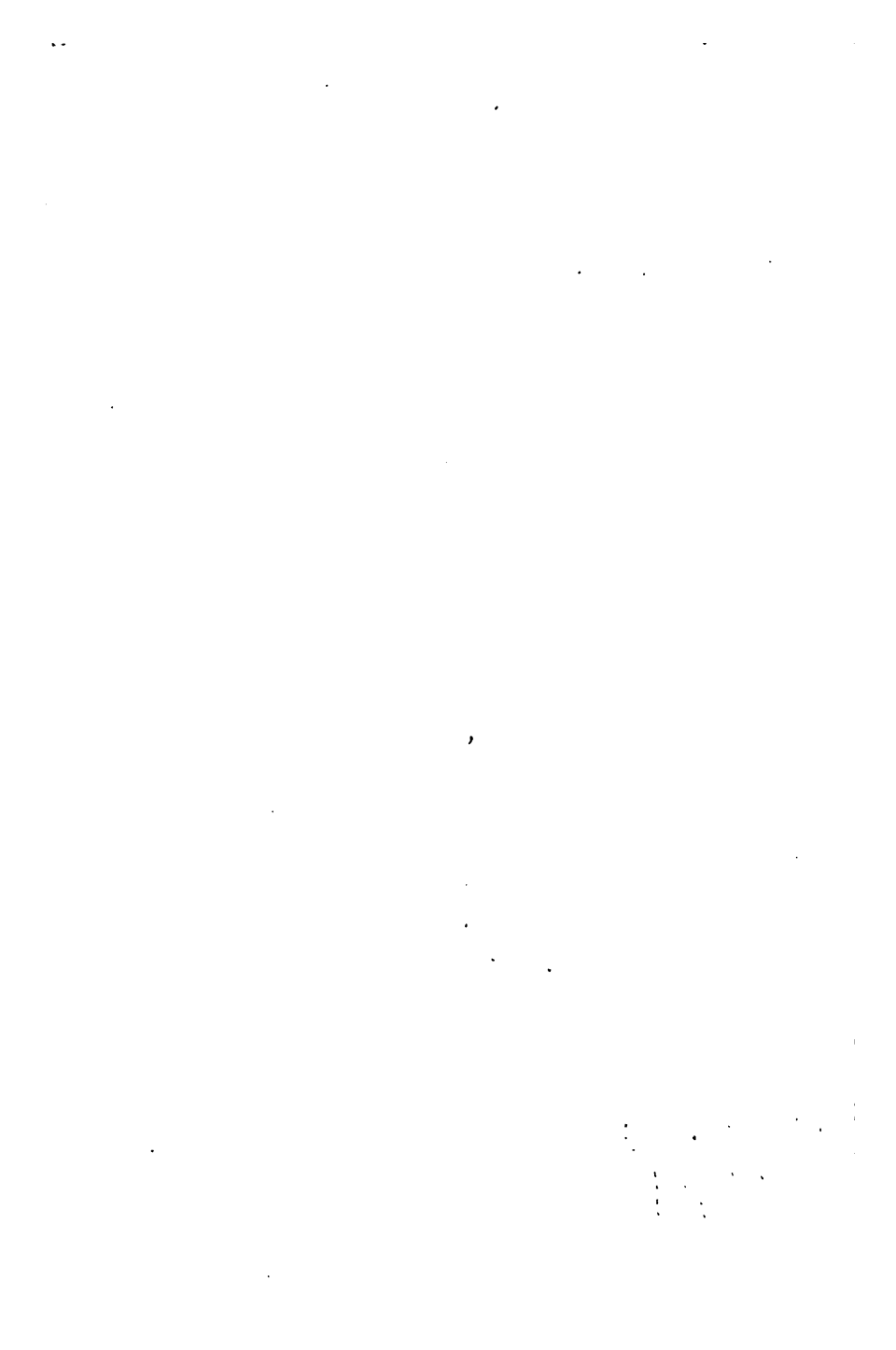




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To
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A Lady of the Regency

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

A GAME OF BLIND MAN'S BUFF

'A CATCH, a catch!'

"Fie! Sir William. I saw you peeping under de handkerchief—God's truth."

"I *must* peep sometimes, madam."

"*Ach!* you are naughty. For fear of treading on de ladies' toes, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"If your Royal Highness will have it so. But surely it is because I must sometimes look at them also."

Sir William Gell, blindfold in the middle of the parquet, turned and bowed to Caroline, Princess of Wales, who stood before him flushed and panting, her full red lips parted in a merry smile.

"Dat's flummery, you delightful wretch; dat is cock and bull."

"I am a blind man, madam, and can see neither cock nor bull, and now you would shut me out even from the light of my regnant constellation."

He bowed again.

"You must play fair, you must play de game."

She stamped her foot, but laughed.

"I vow to be eternally blind in future."

"Den try again. Right about, *augen rechts und links*—so."

She touched the gentleman lightly on the shoulders and spun him round three times, then ran on tiptoe to a corner of the room with her finger on her lip, gathering her skirt hurriedly as she ran, so that the company could not avoid seeing that she wore crimson stockings spangled with gold.

"Silence," she whispered to the ladies and gentlemen who

stood in their niches round the long panelled room. Then, reading from an ivory tablet that hung at her waist, she announced in a clear voice, "De Queen's messenger shall run from Devonport to Bedford."

A little timid lady in brown taffetas fluttered from her corner, but, in fright of the blind man's sweeping arms, turned back and made frantic signs to a tall, dark gentleman clad in the uniform of a Brunswick Hussar, who advanced sidling on the tips of his toes to exchange corners with her.

"Quick, quick!" cried the Princess, seeing his danger.

A scuffle, a flutter, and the little lady, like a frightened moth, went flitting into an opposite alcove.

The Princess clapped her hands and read from her tablets.

"De messenger goes from Leghorn to Kensington. Oh! look at my poor Leghorn, so frightened dere behind a chair. Come along, dear Scallini; Sir William doesn't want to catch you. It is Lady Adela he is after. Run, run, Scallini."

The Italian music-master hurried over the polished floor, and Lady Adela Lupton, an elderly buxom lady, floated past him noiselessly.

A tall figure suddenly appeared in the further doorway, the one at the back of the room through which came a soft glimmer as of candles on a feast table. The Princess's smile became a pout. She ran over to the door.

"Now, Mr. Heseltine," she said to the man at the threshold, "you must play too. You are tiresome. Come, dere is a corner for you close to my dear Joan of Arc, my lady-in-waiting. She will see that you behave."

The gentleman before her bowed.

"Madam, I am in riding dress as you see—in spurs. I have but a quarter of an hour in which to pay my respects."

"Come along, I will not take 'No.' You shall be—what? Ireland, of course. Now de messenger shall go from Ireland to——."

"Madam, I must respectfully decline any share in your game to-night."

She pouted, and looked at him defiantly.

"You are silly," she said. "No one is too old for games. I don't care what dey say about me. I am determined to have jollity."

"God give you all the innocent merriment your Royal Highness desires and deserves."

She put out her hand impulsively, which he kissed. Then she turned abruptly and ran back to her niche. Heseltine

remained leaning in the doorway, an inscrutable expression on his face.

"Silence," she called. "Gloucester Lodge goes to Brunswick. *Mein Gott*, Brunswick—dat's me—Caroline. Quick, Mr. Canning."

The statesman advanced artfully at her summons, making a detour. Twice he retraced his steps, and twice he saved himself only by standing still.

Caroline of Brunswick tripped over her scarf, fell, sprang up again, and reached the sanctuary of a square bow window just as Sir William Gell, after he had flung his arms round an upholstered chair and embraced a screen, was sent sprawling within a yard of her, clutching a fragment of galloon in his hand.

"*Quelle chute!*" cried she, and her laughter rippled and rippled.

"A million pardons," said Sir William, as he tore off the bandage and dropped on one knee in abject confusion. "Behold! This time, madam, I did catch you. See, by this token of fringe from your Royal Highness's scarf."

"No, no. Try again."

"Madam, I appeal to the company assembled."

"No, no. Brunswick is safe," said the hussar gallantly.

"By the skin of its teeth," muttered a gentleman who stood just inside the further door to a lady on a settee beside him.

She laughed and nodded, but motioned caution.

"Hush! you must not say these things. Poor dear creature, why should she not enjoy herself? I am positive her husband, the Prince Regent, never disports himself in any fashion half so innocent and simple. How light-hearted she is. Look at her now, tying the handkerchief round the head of that young military Adonis."

"Lady Anne Hamilton looks like 'a proud embrused swan.'"

"La! Now, Lord Alvanley, none of your quotations for me. But the lady-in-waiting certainly looks offended about something. Tiresome old grandmother! Her face makes me think of boiled parsnips in Lent. Do tell me something gay. What's the news? Here in this dull old Blackheath one hears nothing."

"No change in the condition of the Duke of Glenmore."

"La! Is he so ill?"

"No, but desperately in love, which is bad at fifty-five. It is a question between love and apoplexy. If Miss Connop does not give him an answer by Wednesday, he will run off with her in proper fashion, unless one of his fits has already made away with him."

A Lady of the Regency

"And how is the rest of the world?"

"Well, our charming Lady Air has presented her husband with twins, and they say one is quite black."

"You are too shocking. I want to hear about the world of *belles lettres*. How's Madame de Staël?"

"Flourishing; but she has taken her fine head and her large feet back to Paris. The great lady of the moment is little Miss Tippet, the flower-painter. She is likely to become a rage. One trader in Paternoster Row has offered her a hundred pounds in cash if she will write the story of her life, and an extra hundred down if she will add an intrigue to it."

"She's in luck. An intrigue? How vastly delicious! I assure you I don't think the little woman knows how to spell the word."

"She ought to take lessons of Carlton House."

"Ah! how's the Royal host?"

"The Prince of Wales? More gout and more debts. He is going to ask the nation to help him."

"The nation has already enough to do to feed itself without ministering to the Prince Regent's excesses," said a stern voice.

The other speakers turned to the gentleman in riding dress, who still stood in the doorway. The lady tapped his arm with her fan.

"Oh! you, Mr. Heseltine? We all know what *you* are, you delightful democrat. Fie! you conspirator."

"I am no conspirator, madam, but only a poor Irish gentleman, who has much ado to get in his potatoes, and is not allowed a vote in Parliament because he makes the sign of the cross on entering the church, and because his family for generations have fasted in Lent, and unburdened their bosoms at strict intervals to their family priest."

"Oh! but that is so interesting and *distingué*," purred the lady.

"Interesting to all but myself, madam. It is not interesting to be unable to help the friend who is in difficulty for lack of a shilling, or of mere interest in high places."

"The Regent's friends will have to whistle for both," said Lord Alvanley. "These last Spanish bonds they have taken are absolutely worthless. The Regent and all his brothers knew it half an hour before they foisted the bonds upon their friends."

The man in riding dress started and clenched his hands.

"Good God!" he said. "Lord Alvanley, is this true?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"You had best give James Cherier a hint."

"It's because of Cherier that I am anxious, my lord."

"Who is that?" said the lady.

"As good a Whig and honest a fellow as ever lived."

"You say that because he wants you Catholics emancipated," scoffed the wit.

"My lord, I say it because it is true; and if Cherier were the most bloated Tory I would still stake my life on his honour."

"They say at Court that he has lent money to the Prince of Wales in order to secure His Royal Highness's support in pushing the emancipation measure through next session."

"It is not true. Pray give the lie to all who say it."

"Has not Mr. Cherier a daughter?" chirped the lady.

"Yes, his only child. I have not seen her since she was wild and young enough to climb trees."

"She must be just going to make her curtsy at Court," remarked Alvanley.

"You may depend upon it that her stepmother will keep her in a pinafore and a smock as long as possible," chuckled the lady. "Lady Mildred Cherier is not the woman to let a girl's seasons in Mayfair beat time to the age of her chaperon. Is the child likely to make a stir by beauty?"

The Irishman smiled.

"How can you ask me, madam—I, who scan only the faces of my poor country's peasantry, and can see no colour save the grey of their broken thatches and the green of their hills?"

"She is a great investment—Cherier's daughter—for some fine young man who has no patrimony."

"Then Mayfair will presently have something new and fair to run after, madam," said the Irishman, with an ironical bow.

"A general post!" cried the Princess in the further drawing-room. People scattered and collided in their hurry. The hussar captured a pretty young girl, who submitted by no means unwillingly to the ordeal, and emerged with tossed hair and eyes full of roguishness.

"Now you must play at something quiet," said the Princess. "I am tired."

People formed themselves into gossiping knots. Caroline walked across the room, and entered the smaller apartment, in which the trio were gathered by the door.

"Lord Alvanley, pray go and help them to be merry," she said; "and, Lady Porte, they are sure to want you—you are so lively."

It was obvious dismissal, and the two guests could not disobey.

A Lady of the Regency

The Princess of Wales flung herself down in the settee with relief.

"Thank heaven! I am always afraid of his lordship's little shafts. Why does he come?"

"Your Royal Highness invites him."

"True, but he needn't come all the same," she said peevishly. Heseltine was silent.

"You, now," she said—"you never come."

"Your Royal Highness rarely gives me an invitation."

"*Ach!* how silly. You forget what I say last spring. I say, 'To dose I trust, my house is open.'"

He bowed silently.

"Why can you not jump and frolic and play like de oders to help me?"

"I should feel out of place, madam."

"*Ach!* you do not want; you are bored. You only want politic."

"If I could give up politics for ever, I would gladly do so to serve you, madam."

"Den you will stay here?"

She threw back her head, and her lips coaxed him.

"Ireland wants me."

"Pho! One man cannot help Ireland. Every time de Whigs think dey have got de Regent on their side about the Catholics, they are only encouraging him in his vanity and love of power. Politic, *mein Gott!* My ogre of a husband, the Prince of Wales, will never listen to Catholics. Cards, wine, cravats—dat is de man I married. Pah!"

"I entreat your Royal Highness——"

"Ver well, I will be good, Mr. Heseltine. But when are you coming back to help poor me?"

"Your Royal Highness has my lifelong devotion."

"But I don't like people to have two devotions."

She pouted, and flung herself back again.

"What can I do for you, madam, at this juncture? Yours must be a policy of inaction, for you are on the defensive, remember."

"I want my daughter here—to live wid me."

"That I cannot do. The Princess Charlotte is the only heir to the throne. She is the property of the nation."

She bent her head, and the tears chased one another down her cheeks. She struck her hand angrily on the arm of the settee.

"*Ach!* de nation, always de nation! *Mein Gott*, I am

poorer dan an apple-woman at de corner of de street. I cannot even have my daughter wid me."

Heseltine placed himself in front of the open door, fearful lest the rest of the company should see her emotion.

"Courage"—he spoke very low. "Courage. The Princess Charlotte is her mother's champion. I believe there is nothing she will not do to preserve her mother's honour—even to blowing up Windsor Castle"—he laughed gently. "On all sides I hear that her thoughts are always with you, and that she speaks her mind clearly to the Queen. Have courage. When the Princess Charlotte marries and is free at last, you, madam, will see your long patience rewarded, for at last you will be set in your rightful place in the eyes of the world."

"*Ach!* must you go?" she said between her tears.

"I must. For the moment you are safe! I apprehend no sort of danger. Private business calls me to Northumberland, to a gentleman whose devotion to my party and loyalty to the Prince Regent will, I fear, be rewarded by dastardly fraud and ingratitude."

"God defend all who come into the circle of my husband, the Regent!"

"So be it, madam."

"Do you return straight from Northumberland?"

"No, I go to Ireland. Riots are expected, and I have secretarial work on hand for Mr. Grattan, and perhaps can do something for Mr. Cherier, the friend of whom I spoke. Have I your Royal Highness's leave to go now?"

She gave him her hand and struggled to smile.

"Courage," he whispered. "Courage."

CHAPTER II

THE CHERIERS OF JUNIPER HALL

FROM the mists of Blackheath to the windy fells above the Tyne it is a good two hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies, and for every fifty miles that you go north you add three months' youth to the country. The Northumberland of 1813 was just so much younger by miles and months than the rest of the world below it, even as it is to-day. Never was it more secure in its complacency than when the Court of the Georges waxed and waned under the rule of the world, the flesh, and the devil—surely the only lopsided partnership that ever had a common aim. The devil was not over-busy in Northumberland

at this period, but his truly Georgian boon companions thrive and grew fat. Nor can I blame them, in those halcyon days of many pamphlets and much port, of immense pomposity and gloved grossness, of ubiquitous rhyming and little poetry. Those were the days of June Cherier's girlhood, and no one ever estimated the scintillant possibilities of the world more duly, or gave them with a cleaner palate, than her father, that erstwhile tremendous old Northumbrian Whig, Squire Cherier, of Juniper Hall, near Hexham.

I would have you hear him deliver himself on occasion concerning the value of the world to men. That was during the years when loss of estate and the ingratitude of his colleagues had forced him to alter considerably the splendid contempt for worldly things in which he indulged during prosperity. "The world," he would begin, his northern burr clinging to him in spite of the lingo of the foreign place of exile to which debt had relegated him—"the world is a varra fine thing, sir. Beautiful clothes, well worn, beautiful people, beautiful horses, are the riches of earth and the gifts of heaven, sir. Why damn and abuse them, sir? Why do these greasy chaplains throw mud at the world in which they have never dwelt?"

Square-shouldered, with iron-grey hair and eyes, this vision it was of his friend that filled the imagination of the Irishman who travelled northwards from Blackheath. For he loved this rough yeoman lord, maker of mines and owner of wood and forest, loved his vagaries and his excellences, his blundering policy, and his clean heart, his vehemence, and his generosity.

Stephen Heseltine's thoughts brought many a smile to his face as the coach left York and posted to Durham, till the northern chills made him draw his cape about him, and St. Luke's summer was left behind in the Midlands.

In all the times of the All-Talents Clique, and during the chief portion of the reign of that sack-of-flour Premier, that Prosperity Jack, Lord Liverpool, there was no sturdier Briton than James George Cherier, of Juniper Hall. Had he possessed a touch more of the pleasant devil, the ingenious devil, the creature who is all brains without guile, he might have made a mark as great as Mr. Canning, whom James George was always pleased to dub an arch-renegade. Nay, it is possible, so good were his brains and so honest his purpose, that he might have shown himself quite as valuable to the country, for he was among the few that kept pace with George Canning in lightning grasp of an intricacy, and when he struck a blow, or made a point, it was with no less

stupendous effect. With such weapons he might have more than once outdone Mr. Brougham, who loved fancy so far above fact, or rather selected which ever most nobly furthered the coruscations of the discourse in hand. But James George Cherier was slow—slow of speech, with that Northumbrian slowness in which consideration is three parts of the effort of delivery. Secure in the fortress of his hardly won opinions, he preferred, even in the sanctuary of his own Northumbrian estate, to leave the talk to others. That silence in assembly grew upon him, it may be, in proportion to the influence given to table-talk in the home circle by the brilliant tattle of Mr. Edward Frewin, his secretary.

This Mr. Frewin knew to a die-spot what the gossip was at White's, the last scandal about Mrs. Clark and her admirers, the cost of the very last orgy at Carlton House, the stories afloat about the frolics of the unhappy Princess of Wales, and everything piquant and desirable that men and women of fashion require to know, which he would gather at the stall of Mrs. Burt, the fruit-woman, where every gentleman of St. James's paused in his morning lounge. This sort of nodish flunkey-talk Mr. Frewin poured straightway into the ears of his master's wife, Lady Mildred Cherier, who lived for the flicker of wax candles at routs, and for all things decently wanton. Dear lady! It is regrettable that, though the triple partners quoted above animated her to a great extent, she was yet too studiously elegant to afford us much edification of the warring of good and bad in her. The Earls of Dune, who bequeathed to her their nice blood, mixed it wrong. Her tears were lukewarm. Her life, a shifting panorama of elegant raptures and childish rages, was joined to that of James George in 1799, and Mr. Brougham himself drove to the wedding with the bridegroom, whose second nuptials had been the cause of much comment on his friends' part.

June could just remember it all—how sweet Joan Scott (whose joy-bells, on her wedding with Mr. Canning, rang but a few months later) told her to kiss her pretty, new mamma when Lady Mildred, bedewed with the pathos that was so easily stirred, stepped out of her father's house in Piccadilly on to the *tapis d'amitié* of wool which the blue-veined hands of aristocratic virgins had stitched for the saving of the bride's sandals. June, still clinging to Joan's hand, had obediently lifted up her face. It was not her ladyship, however, but June's father, who took the child up to give her a bear's hug. When he put her down, he entered abruptly the carriage

in which his new wife sat, and he never turned his head again to the company, for his first wife's eyes seemed to be looking at him from a baby face.

Then James George, remembering what he had said to that first love of his, was glad that the season was still early spring. Northumbrians are scarcely ever articulate lovers, but James George, when he found that there was something in life besides good fishing, good mining, and sound patriotism, managed his early wooing with dignity. The conditions of that courtship brought out in him the golden appreciation of simple and precious things. When he had gravely wooed and gravely won, he said to his first lady, "I think, dear, that marriage-feasts should be kept in the summer, when all things come to fruition."

Thus the only child of the union—James George always vowed that he hated a litter—was called after that month of roses in which they were wedded.

June grew but slowly, and the roses that her name pictured were pale and tardy, though she spent most of her life on Northumbrian fells, whilst the Squire and Lady Mildred mixed with the big world far away in London. Of learning and schooling she had little at first, but as the years went on and the Squire awoke to the swift understanding of the child, he would teach her himself in his library out of strange absurdities of books, primers without soul or purpose. From these the girl's nature recoiled in utter annoyance, and the Squire wished that she had been a boy, so that he might know what method to pursue, for a course of things polemical, the dearest thing he had at heart, was not, in his opinion, for the female mind. At the same time June baffled him in the same strange, attractive way that her mother, a Gulliamy of Warkworth, had baffled him. At last, in despair, he asked Mr. Frewin to teach the child some French, some poetry, and any Latin he could put into her wandering head. Then it became a different affair. The young man, never greedy of exertion, found that it sufficed his own peace of mind to leave his charge among a heap of volumes while he wrote innocent and ardent sonnets to her ladyship, or some imaginary deity, at the other end of a great book-room. It was then that June discovered that to learn alone, and learn for love, is to learn surely.

Puckish and prankish by nature, large-eyed and full of fantasy, wiry and supple of body, no one knew, or cared to know, what kept her brown head busy all those northern days. But she grew to have a status of her own, independent of all, whether they were the country-folk who still said "Mistress "

instead of "Mrs.," the household of the Hall itself, or those—many of them great persons of territory and standing—who dwelt on Tyneside, and ate and drank and lumbered heavily into municipal contracts and out of them again. June, in her child's way, sometimes wondered what appearance these persons could have borne when young—wondered whether the veins in John Fenwick's cheeks were always marked in mulberry juice on the surface, and if Miss Payton of Gunnerton was born in the frilled bonnet she wore so glued to her smooth head; wondered, indeed, if they had ever been young and lisping, and at a disadvantage towards their neighbours. These people, and their Border castles, half-ruined, half-patched with ruthless hideousness and that due regard to cheapness of material so peculiar to their province, belonged to a world that seemed to suffer no change or variation. It was just there—it always had been there. It spoke of salmon and the chances of the hay; it was heavily proud of the black patches and the funnels that belched wealth. It laughed little, pondered, or thought that it pondered, more, and ate much. In the Northumberland of 1813 there was only one opinion tenable for the world in general, and it was the opinion of Tyneside. Some will have it that Tyneside has not changed this attitude. But with this I have at the moment no concern.

In such a surrounding, Squire Chier's girl should have grown up, as other men's girls grew in that place, complaisant as a cow and mild as a missionary, meek and reliable, old ere youth was begun. Thanks, however, to Lady Mildred's neglect, and a certain unexpected comrade, she remained untrained, isolated, simple, but uncrushed by Tyneside gloom. That comrade was a boy, and he came into her life as a revelation of energy and romantic endeavour. When the bald, puffy-faced ecclesiastic under whom the Chieriers worshipped at the village of Heughside, close by, undertook to coach the nephew and heir of the Cornish Lord Ibbs for Oxford Schools, June was just fifteen. It amused the Squire to show the lad, Conway Dorren, how to fish and how to break in a pony, and Conway, who loved dead languages as little as he loved the little grey gimlet eyes of the ex-Navy chaplain, or his dusty collar, was naturally more at the Hall than at the shabby Rectory. The three years of his tutoring passed quickly enough. He went away to the University as June was on the point of attending, for the first time, a social Tyneside gathering. From it she returned with a profound conviction that the world of dogs and fish, miners and grooms and country gentlemen, was

different from a something outside, in which people acted in tremendous concerted masses—something made and marred ; above all, felt. During the festivity, a messenger with mails had arrived with news that called a guest away. There was a stir. A belated *Gazette* gave news of disaster to our troops in Spain. Bloody news, and a sudden journey! Tyneside was agitated above measure. Life was not unpleasant, so far as June knew the meaning of pleasant things, but she was glad, as near exhilaration as she had ever been, when, after two years' absence, Conway wrote that he would come for a part of his summer vacation to Heughside.

CHAPTER III

HER LADYSHIP INTERVENES

THE arrival of Conway Dorren imperceptibly squeezed Mr. Frewin out of his place in the household. Its graceful mistress, possessed (never let us doubt it) of supernal youth, chose to weary of her old satellite. His Mayfair stories rang stale. Conway, fresh from the romance of student life, was aflame with ardour and youth, full of reverence for the great epics, had a nice ear for rhyming, and was animated by those glowing impulses which divided the old boy-life from the man-life at Oxford. And thus Lady Mildred's camp split.

It was "Con" here and "Con" there, and Con must read the fashionable news to her ladyship of a morning, and it was his arm she would take on the terrace after dinner, and to him she would appeal to tie a wayward shoe-lace, or to assist with reverent fingers in keeping in its place (if her hand could not always find it) the great amber fretted comb that sustained her negligent tresses. Conway, not insensible to so much condescension, took it even as his right as a man of the world and a hero, for he was no less aware of the bubbling in him of the noble and the splendid than are all other self-conscious heroes who inscribe their names in the scrip of their college. He was in a mood for idyll, but that idyll did not for a moment translate itself into intrigue with her ladyship. While men are children, such futilities of the heart do not occur to them. So Conway still waited for his fairy princess, while he wore the favours of his hostess as to the manner born. There was nothing lacking in his world. June was a blithe comrade, and she, too, openly showed her faith in him as a man of parts. They rode together and they fished together.

Mr. Frewin did not join in sport. It occurred to him that some amusement was necessary also to him, and so he set himself to play the adorer of the girl, from sheer curiosity to see how she would bear herself under conditions so strange. He could never have imagined anything so fresh and interesting as the sensation this afforded. He compared her with other objects of his gallantry, and found her beyond expression worthy of courtship. He told himself that she was *bizarre* and delectable, with other Frenchified qualifications. Her unconsciousness piqued him enormously. In proportion as she disregarded his looks and his remarks did he set himself assiduously to address her, and his tactics only took a shape the more definite when he discovered that Conway's glances continually, if unconsciously, followed the girl. Edward Frewin's post was a snug affair. His intricate knowledge of Carlton House matters made him indispensable to his burly master. His adroitness constituted him, socially, Lady Mildred's right hand; and he was determined that she should repent of the snubbing he received. He had lived by his wits ever since he could remember, and his ambition was boundless. His graceful figure, his fastidious ways, gave him the entry in many a case where his brains would not have helped him. He knew well how to pursue June without committing himself. He began to be formal, then made a point of talking to her apart, studied her fancies, and, without appearing to do so, arranged diversions in which the mistress of the household could not take part.

June was only vaguely troubled at first. As her father's penman, as her stepmother's cavalier, and her own tutor, she had always stood in some awe of the secretary. He attracted her, in spite of herself, from his mysterious traffic with those great things in which she longed to have a share, and he fed her curiosity, rejoicing in the quick changes of her face as she heard him. He teased her for her rural tastes, smiled at her eagerness to be up with the sun and out in the woods, and once he waited on the steps of the window that led from the breakfast-room with a bunch of flowers she most fancied. He was cordial to the boy, and the fact that Conway was undisguisedly annoyed merely told in the secretary's favour.

June did not probe her feelings; but she placed herself on her guard as soon as Mr. Frewin began to interweave raillery of her friend with his courtesies.

"What a child!" he said one day, shaking his head with a smile, as Conway accepted some challenge of his hostess. "If Mr. Cherier only had his eyes open, he would not let his

wife encourage such a baby. After all, it is best to leave her to manage him. In calf love there is nothing so hard to bear as a crushing dismissal from your deity; besides, it is part of the youth's education. Heaven knows he needs such taming and polishing."

June opened her eyes and looked at him. He tried to follow this up presently by allusion to the winter and her coming entry into society.

"A Newcastle ball!" he scoffed. "You must dance your first quadrille in London. The Squire entirely forgets the place that his only daughter must now take."

"Oh, I shall speak to my father, Mr. Frewin."

She walked along the garden stripping lavender stalks.

"I think I should have the most influence. He would be the less likely to refer the matter to other parties."

He looked in the direction of the path down which Conway and his hostess had disappeared. June's handkerchief dropped and their hands touched. He held hers and looked at it.

"You are a real Hebe, deliciously sunburnt. I salute you in the name of Pan."

A kiss on the hand need not be alarming. It is not a gallantry of which a woman can complain from a gentleman, and there was not the slightest lack of romance in Frewin's manner. But the untried June assured herself that it was no compliment. Thenceforward her self-consciousness was uppermost.

September had come, and with it the shooting. To Gunner-ton Crags the Squire went, and with him the boy, while the rest drove to a meeting-place with provisions. June, always fearful of a *l'ête-à-l'ête*, escaped to scale the rocks. But Mr. Frewin had his own plans. Most dutifully did he establish his master's wife with her cushions in a shady spot, and then he deliberately tracked the girl, cutting off her course by a short cut over the crags. She did not look any too well pleased to see him.

Just then Conway whistled from the other side of a hill—a whistle which was always a summons to his girl comrade.

She stopped, shading her eyes, and looked into the direction from which the sound had come.

"Impertinent young jackanapes!" ejaculated the secretary.

"Do not answer him."

"But I wish to go."

"You wish to follow a whistle? *You?*"

She coloured and bit her lip, and felt herself a child.

"If you wish to go, this is the best path," he said.

"Thanks, I am not in a great haste. I can go the longer way."

"Why not rest a little in this bracken? You look tired. These rough country rambles are too much for you."

A curious pride prompted her to act up to the dignity he imposed upon her. She let him beat down the bracken into a nest, and he threw himself at her feet.

"You are angry with me, because I reminded you that you are Miss Cherier. And I presumed in saying it. But that boy is not playing—he worships the very ground upon which you tread. I had it out with him yesterday."

"You—spoke—of me?"

"Indirectly. And I told him to be careful. He detests me, of course. June"—he looked searchingly at her—"he is a fine young fellow, but a child. He dares what I do not dare. I need not tell you what that is. Every woman has enough learning for that."

June did not answer. This sudden atmosphere of emotion paralysed her.

"You have more than common beauty. Your eyes——"

"Not more beautiful than my mamma's," she laughed, with some malice.

"Who but a fool sought to compare two pairs of eyes."

She played with her bonnet-strings.

"You are buried in a hole with nothing but yokels to see you—who should be known and praised by the wits and the critics. One day you will have life at your feet. The Regent himself will crown you."

She laughed, more out of embarrassment than anything else.

"You may laugh. But what is this boy? What has he done? He is but a student, and any day Lord Ibbs may marry again and disinherit him."

"He is my friend."

"June, do you love him?"

He expected confusion, distress, even peevishness; but her loyalty to the boy was strong, and a certain pettiness which she had always associated with this man of Mayfair was for the time uppermost in her mind.

He had taken her hand almost eagerly. She drew it quietly away, and laid it lightly and with a shade of familiarity on his arm as she answered:

"Do you remember who you are?"

Then, with composure that her stepmother could not have beaten, she tied her bonnet-strings as she rose and turned away.

A Lady of the Regency

"You are very proud of your blood," was the bitter answer, while his pale face deepened in colour. "I have no defence against you, since I am in your father's pay. You have reminded me so that I shall not forget it; but you stooped needlessly, June. Love acknowledges no barriers. Moreover, I have no pride, for I do not ask you for anything. I am fully aware of my place."

He bowed with grandeur.

There came once more from below the boy's whistle.

"They are waiting for us," continued the secretary coolly. "Your tippet is loose, and you have dropped your glove. Permit me. This is the shortest way. The steps are very steep."

Mr. Frewin remained victor. He insisted on guiding her with ostentatious deference down a steep short cut which placed them in full view of the rest of the party. He knew that Lady Mildred had her eye-glass up and that Conway was watching them. June knew it also. She wished no risk of a scene. From boulder to boulder the steps were sometimes very steep. Mr. Frewin obstinately assisted her. Fuming, she dared not do otherwise than coldly acquiesce, but there were tears of rage under her heavy lids, and she thought with shame that she was but a country girl, and that Mr. Frewin, whom she hated, was a fine gentleman, and had the best of her with his flow of language and his romantic attitudes; and she told herself that she was blunt and uncouth and unlovely, and that her hands, when he took them in his white ones, were brown, and her hair twisted anyhow—indeed, that everything was hateful and wrong.

Innocent persons go perilously near the truth. There was not a soul at Juniper Hall who knew of the shadow on Mr. Frewin's origin. The retort at which June had caught as a weapon of emergency did not spring from a sense of tactics—a thing she did not possess. She had merely struck out blindly. She hated herself for it now, and without power of analysis knew that she had made a false step. Lady Mildred's worship of class difference, her sudden change of front towards her favourite cavalier, were thrown into the weight. June had often overheard her regret to Conway the social status of Mr. Frewin.

"His family are poor. They are—or were—*commerçants*; and, Con, they are not even Roman Catholics, which is always romantic."

They found mamma querulous. Her ladyship's pretty nose, she declared, was beginning to peel with the tropical heat.

It was certainly no sweet sylvan repast—June silent, the secretary full of provoking gallantries, the Squire seated squarely on a stone swearing good-humouredly at his dogs while he drank ale and ate great Northumbrian hunks of beef, and Conway puzzled and inclined to wrath because June had fenced herself in behind a peaked jag of rock where he could not eat fruit from her plate in his accustomed boyish way. While the horses were being harnessed she disappeared, and Lady Mildred's vexation fastened upon the fact. She mounted the chaise petulantly and called to Mr. Frewin and Conway to follow.

"Let me find June."

The boy's smile was winning.

"I cannot wait. Let her walk back. You, Con, spoil the child even more than her father. Give her a scolding, and make her come home with you; and, Edward Frewin, for heaven's sake take your seat and put up my parasol—my neck is burnt to a cinder."

Not even Conway's liquid brown eyes could melt her mood. Shouldering his gun he moved towards the quarter whence came the sounds of dogs and keepers. But June was not with her father, and the boy wondered unceasingly at her sudden disappearance.

CHAPTER IV

CONWAY DORREN FINDS HIS EYES

To June, who had no experience of courtship or the clashing of sex, Mr. Frewin's subtle attentions and incitements were nothing like the romances to be found in her stepmother's boudoir. The deficiency had not been supplied by the romantic Mrs. Hester, Lady Mildred's tirewoman, none of whose tales of pompous wooing met the case. As thus:—
"He began his task with great care, as a gentleman should, and that she (that's my former mistress, Miss June) might be persuaded of his honourable intentions towards her, he sent first a letter by a messenger (in full livery) to her guardian, respectfully requesting an interview on a matter of great importance, and one which indeed meant life or death to the writer. When the letter came, my young mistress, who was all over nerves, came to me crying, 'Hetty, Hetty, Lord B's. man is here. Something shocking has surely happened! His master has gone away, perhaps without personal farewell,

and this will be a letter of "*conjay*." I am lost, Hetty. I shall never be able to hide the pain of this aching heart.' And indeed, Miss June, I was not sorry to see her so enwrapped and tortured, for she had kept the poor fellow dangling so long that the valet at Brooks's told Lord B's. creature that it was pitiful to see the laughing-stock made of his master by the other gentlemen. For he always lost at cards, and drank deeper every night."

A natural reluctance to confide in the maid sealed for the future June's talks with Mrs. Hester. The utter absence of any real understanding between the Squire and his own flesh and blood barred her from assistance in that quarter. She would have borne the torments of hell before going to her stepmother for advice. An instinct told her that Lady Mildred would resent the affair as a personal insult, and perhaps turn her into ridicule. She walked resolutely away from the rest across the fields to the woods she loved best, and here a sudden reminiscence brought her to a dead stop. Here, but three years ago, she had leant across the sloping pathway at the edge of a quarry-pit to pull a flowering branch, and had failed, and the boy had crept down to the brink to get it for her, keeping one hand in hers lest he should slip. As he turned, the loose earth had nearly played him false, and she had clung to him with both hands, holding him back by sheer nervous vigour until he could make a foothold of a strong root. He had paused then to laugh reassurance, for her hands were shaking, and before she knew it he had drawn her face down to his. It was as inevitable as the brushing of two leaves in the wind, and it had seemed as natural. But now—She shuddered, as if she had suddenly become aware of some terrible recess in her soul. For his part, Conway had entirely forgotten it, nor did he remember the spot. All he knew was that for the first time in his life he saw June crying.

"What is it?" he asked tenderly, when he came upon her.

"Go away!"

"Not till you tell me what grieves you."

She could not answer.

"I have found such a trout pool," he began, thinking she would be interested. "I want to take you there to-morrow morning early. It is like fairyland."

"I have no wish to go."

"What have I done?"

He was genuinely alarmed, but he tried to take her hands from her face.

"Go away," she said sharply. "Have you no manners, after all?"

"June, who has been defaming me?"

"No one. You are tiresome."

"I am very sorry. I am not clever like Mr. Frewin."

"How dare you name him?"

"I dare, because his insolence to me yesterday was more than a gentleman can stand. Who is it that has so disturbed you?"

She let the secretary's name slip, and here and there he dragged from her a sentence.

"So he told you he loved you? He has said as much to the nymphs of Berkeley Row."

"What is Berkeley Row?"

He smiled exquisite patronage.

"It is not for ladies to know."

"If you know, I shall know too."

She sat up in the grass and smoothed the brown hair resolutely from her forehead.

Conway ceased his cock-of-the-walk strides and delivered himself.

"I will not be the one to tell you. Women must be kept from these things; only men must know."

"Men must help women," retorted June, colouring.

"So they do. Command me."

"You can kill Mr. Frewin."

"My hands are longing to be at him. What did he say of me?"

"I cannot tell you—I cannot say it."

"O-h-h!"

The truth dawned upon him and made him resolute.

"There is no need for him to interfere. I came here to speak to you myself. Did you keep him at bay?"

She faltered out the retort.

"Did that take down his insolence?"

"His lips went grey. It makes me afraid."

She flung her hands out with a gesture of despair and walked down to the Tyne's edge. For a creature so full of glancing motion it was wonderful indeed that she should remain still so long. Something held Conway where he stood watching her as she crouched on a grey stone, a figure instinct with unaccustomed fatigue.

So Conway gazed. Clyte herself had surely never had so superb and dear a droop of the head. And the pose! Why, in all the galleries of Paris he had not seen sculptures like

this breathing woman. Unclaimed? Yes, so far; but how infinitely wonderful to be her discoverer!—she, wholly desirable a jewel; he, aflame from top to toe. It was love—that which gods and men so ardently desire, and this a supreme moment. It was not enough to bask comfortably in June's comradeship—without her he was but half a man. He should have known it long since. What a marvellous love-world! It was summer—he, twenty-one, and a man; she—why, she was love! Where were his eyes? Curses on him. Maudeslay (of Christ's) often told him that women like to be mastered, and Maudeslay was rich in experience of pleasant intrigues. Yet surely a gentlewoman—and such a one as this—could not be handled like a rebellious filly or a barmaid? And yet the bright-eyed young woman on whom he squandered quotations from the Odes in an Oxford inn was a lady also, a queen of love. Gad! they were all queens. But were they all attainable? No. There lay the difference. But this was summer. And yet, could he, all unrehearsed, make a declaration for which she was all unprepared? He was not afraid of her, surely? His hand was trembling—he could tell it by his cane. Rubbish! How despicable and glorious! . . . He would go to her and look into her eyes, and she would certainly say, "Rise up, my splendid Conway, and take me, for I am yours." So let Horace and Juno bless! Flinging his cane away, with a delicate and royal extravagance, he sprang lightly to the girl's side and threw his arms round her.

"Take care, take care," she cried, and pushed him away, hardly knowing why.

"You ask me to kill Mr. Frewin," he urged hurriedly; "but the world has many such men, and unless I may be your chosen protector, I shall have no right excuse for my championship. I cannot break a man's head for making covert love to you, if I cannot treat him as a double thief who steals that which is mine as well as yours." He spoke the words as if no man had ever used the argument before, and knelt prettily at her feet, as Maudeslay had said a gentleman should, and took her hands. "You are my treasure," he assured her, "and I must keep you jealously."

She shrank still, more incredulous than afraid. She—a treasure? She tried to rise, but she could not. She laid one hand very gently on his breast as if to keep him at a distance till her mind was clear.

"Are you doing right?" she asked him at last.

He nodded, smiling, and threw fresh fire into his eyes.

"I am afraid, afraid. I thought, I thought I should know."

"You are the wisest of sybils. You know it all, what love is, what you are, how I have need of you. Look, this is summer. Listen overhead. You are my flower. I gather you."

He knew himself to be inspired, and his assurance swept with it her last resistance, and so inexhaustible is the heat of youth that that kiss was as fresh as if he had never taken or asked one of a foolish inn-maid, to whom such things were as small coin lightly squandered for the smoothing of existence. But to June it was nothing but a heavenly confusion of head and pulse, a wonder of wonders, accompanied by a piteous heart-cry for true love and for all its holy refuge.

He wondered that she had borne with the secretary's attentions—"a mere clerk, who, if he weren't a dandy, would be sitting on an attorney's stool."

She tossed her head and answered him in the favourite French phrases of her stepmother, and asked him to tell her if her cheeks needed powder.

He settled his cravat in the manner of Frewin, and began :

"Ha—my friend the Regent was good enough to inform me recently——"

And she in answer trilled a tinkling ditty which Lady Mildred sang nightly to the harp while the boy turned her pages.

So they fought and teased, and then a great silence stole over them till the sun sank and a chill fell upon the girl. She rose suddenly and spoke almost in a whisper :

"Come."

He took her into his arms again, forgetful of everything but youth and the rustling of the woods.

Not before Edward Frewin had stood several seconds in full view were they aware of an audience.

CHAPTER V

SQUIRE CHERIER FULFILS A CONVENTION

STEPHEN HESELTINE was not a little annoyed on his arrival at Hexham to discover that the stage went no further than the town. He must, therefore, take a gig and drive the remaining fifteen miles. He breakfasted at the nearest inn, and fell into talk with some young squires who were after cub-hunting. In the coffee-room there was also a moody young gentleman who took no part in the general talk. The Irishman, wishing to

show him comradeship, presently asked him the best road to Heughside—the best for a hired gig.

The young man's face lightened.

"It is not easily explained," he said, "but if you will get me a scrap of paper, I will give you a plan of the route. I have known it from childhood."

"How near, then, is the Hall to the village?"

"A mile and a half as they measure in these outlandish parts." Then the youth looked hard at his new acquaintance.

"Do you know Squire Cherier?"

"In London, well."

"H'm, perhaps he has two faces. In Northumberland you will find him a boor."

"I hope, sir, he has some friends here. Some day he will need them."

"That, sir, is not my affair. Until yesterday Mr. Cherier had no greater admirer than myself; but under certain conditions a man becomes nothing but a pig-headed tyrant."

The gig came up to the door. Something in the youth's fierce and forlorn mien moved Heseltine to offer his services if the young stranger should wish any message delivered to the Hall.

"I will write," he said eagerly, then shook his head. "I all but gave my word of honour that I would not write," he said, and then looked as confused as a girl, that he should have let a stranger glimpse into his private matters.

"Possibly, sir, my vehicle may be of service to you in case you are going in that direction? I need not say that your companionship will be very welcome along a lonely road, and your guidance will help me to find the lanes better than any map."

The alacrity with which the youth accepted would have made many a less acute man smile.

The gig swung along smartly. The boy introduced himself with some haughtiness. Determined to cover his previous want of discretion, he now swaggered freely, spoke of Oxford, affected to know all the faro tables in Paris and all the fencing saloons of St. James's, and spoke of the Grand Tour that was to come. And the stranger listened, entering into the boy's mood, his spare face irradiated by the faintest of smiles. Indeed, in watching Heseltine's mouth, you would find his lips alter but slightly, for the complaisance which gave the impression of laughter lay in his eyes.

At Wark the youth showed his new acquaintance the road,

warned him of the loose stones on Hoxty Hill, and, waving his cap grandly, struck off to the woods by the river. His quick injunction to the Irishman not to mention at Juniper Hall his name, or the meeting, deepened the smile in Heseltine's eyes.

Two days after the Gunnerton expedition, her ladyship, suspicious of certain glances she had intercepted on the previous night, kept her ears and eyes open. She sailed down to breakfast early, and raised her eyebrows when the secretary told her that June was still out, and had probably gone with her young cavalier.

Happy, full of the joy of the dewy morning and the delight of stolen interviews, the two returned. There was defiance in every movement of the girl, there was cool resolve in that of the boy. They knew that sooner or later they must declare themselves, but neither was prepared for the sentence that was passed on them an hour later.

It happened that on their ramble home the boy found a seal which he did not recognise, and playfully hung it on a long chain June wore about her neck. While they sat out breakfast, she saw the secretary glance keenly at the jingling bunch of charms at her waist. Then she divined and reddened furiously. Lady Mildred happened to see it. She had found suddenly that languishing glances had lost their effects on Conway. Now her eyes were open.

"What is that locket?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Miss June does me too much honour," said Mr. Frewin, bowing.

Lady Mildred stared. Then she said coldly:

"I do not understand."

Conway glared at Mr. Frewin, who quietly carried on the conversation to June.

"It is a beautiful morning. I do not wonder that we were tempted by its beauty."

"Indeed? I did not know you loved wet grass."

"It is a very different matter when one braves its chill for beauty's sake," said he, with a cynical smile that included Conway.

And still Lady Mildred stared, while Conway fumed, and June grew more and more self-conscious.

After breakfast her ladyship pulled her Indian scarf angrily about her, and went to her husband. He was seated before his table, frowning at a long haberdasher's bill.

"Here's a nice little reckoning, madam," he said sternly—"blush roses, and a suit of pearls, and a Circassian robe. Your cursed filigree will ruin me."

"We will talk of those, James, when you tell me what you wish to do with your daughter."

"What of her?"

"Nothing"—she fanned herself with negligence—"a mere nothing, James; merely that she lets herself be played with by any penniless boy that happens to come across her. An assignation in the woods, a kiss-and-cuddle friendship with this child, who may never have a penny to his name! Lord Ibbs may marry—a sodden rake, perhaps, but still an heir is not impossible. And even so the old baron hangs on to life like a limpet on one of his own Cornish cliffs."

For five minutes the Squire was incomprehensible for rage, to his lady's delight.

"How do you know?" he asked at last.

"She makes eyes like any milkmaid. Know? Why, all your own gillies know it, and have seen them meeting. If you do not believe me, you can ask Mr. Frewin. He warned the boy."

The Squire was much troubled. He was a father; he was also a territorial magnate. Had you asked his opinion on the harem in the abstract, he would have told you, with many weighty periods, that the Turk was an unclean beast, and his women slaves, whom it was the duty of every Englishman to liberate. But to give his girl freedom of action, and let her find her own wisdom thereby, would have occurred to him as little fitting or wise as to turn loose into his neighbour's land the colt his grooms were training for Hexham Steeplechases.

In a weak moment he consulted his secretary. Mr. Frewin's artful pity of the boy, his apparent desire that the whole thing should be regarded as an escapade, only set the Squire more firmly against the youth; and the penman did not forget to remind his master of the girl's future and her dowry, and to accentuate the spendthrift nature of her lover.

"I have never spoken of marriage to her, sir," was Conway's first response to the Squire's storm.

"Oh, you haven't, have you? Then what d'y'e mean?"

"I have obeyed your daughter's wishes, sir."

"Wishes? Women are made of them. What else?"

"There is nothing else. I have loved her for some time."

"Oh, you have, have you? You can stop it now."

"I can promise nothing of the sort."

"A girl all wishes, and a man who can promise nothing!"

Gad ! I'll promise you something to make up for it. You shall not have my daughter, and you shall not come into my house."

"I will do just as she wishes."

"You had better remove your baggage now. Your pony is already saddled."

"Then good-day, sir. My baggage can follow me to the Greyhound at Hexham."

"There must be no fooling, mind ? If I catch you at games in the woods I'll shoot you—as a poacher. I'll have no man sneaking after my girl."

"By God, sir, your daughter chooses between us."

As he turned on his heel the Squire softened.

"My boy, do something, be something. You don't want to follow in Lord Ibbs's footsteps."

"Lord Ibbs treats me as a gentleman, sir, and credits me with purpose. Your daughter is good enough to share his views. Good-day."

CHAPTER VI

HER STEPSHIP'S CLAWS

FOR the rest of that day, the Squire grumbled softly to himself and stole little glances at his daughter.

She had heard his thunder from her window, and had feasted her eyes on the youth and beauty of the boy as he stood stalwart and resolute in opposition ; and she thanked heaven he was not bull-necked like her father, and wore no creases in his gaiters.

But when he was gone, without a single word to her, she slipped away to the still-room—secure from her ladyship, who fainted at the mention of aniseed or oils—and cried herself sick.

The Squire had not calculated on one thing—his girl's abnormal power of disguising emotion. To this she added (a legacy from her half-French mother) a certain tenacity, and sufficient audaciousness to play with an enemy, even when herself at a disadvantage.

She had been left so long unmolested in personal matters, outside the pale of her wardrobe, that the drastic treatment of her lover and interference in her affairs astounded her ; and it was as much for his interference as for his criticism of the boy that she loathed the secretary. She was fully aware that her father disliked any display of emotion, and that he shunned

explanation. His furtive and troubled looks she returned, therefore, with an uncomprehending stare. For the first time in her life she dressed herself with special coquetry and watched an opportunity for making her presence felt. It came quickly. Edward Frewin loitered about the garden not wholly pleased with the part he had played on the previous day. When he saw June take her book under the trees he hesitated to approach; possibly he resolved to see in what mind she took the affair. To his surprise, she smiled, and engaged him in a long discussion on the character of the heroine of the volume on her knee. While they were talking, well within view of the avenue, the barouche drove up to take out her ladyship, who came fluttering presently with calls for the secretary. June rose and sauntered towards the carriage.

"I have half a mind to come too," she said, knowing that it would spoil her stepmother's afternoon.

Lady Mildred cried archly that the child was growing quite reformed, adding that she must put on her new pelisse and a proper hat if she really intended to take the air. A change of garb was a safe deterrent to impatient June. She was aware of her stepmother's tactics, and, yawning, said that in this case she would sit under the trees and listen to Mr. Frewin's interesting tales about "The Great Unknown" and the Waverley Novels.

"Mr. Frewin is coming with me," snapped the older woman.

"Oh! he promised to explain to me some Italian, now."

Edward Frewin's vanity was gloriously tickled. He looked at her ladyship and thought the time had come for retaliation.

"I did give my promise to June," he said formally, "not aware that your ladyship required my attendance to-day. The Squire asked me also to see that certain papers of his were copied and sent off by the early mail."

So Lady Mildred flounced off alone, only to return in the worst of tempers when she found tea under the trees, and June telling the secretary's fortune by the leaves in his cup, while he leant over the back of her seat.

Lady Mildred rustled up and sent Edward Frewin off to find her lapdogs, and then she set June fetching and carrying.

For politic reasons the girl obeyed, for she saw a storm brewing. But at last her pride brought things to a crisis.

"I'll not get those creepers now," she said quietly. "It will do later. And then, perhaps, Mr. Frewin will go for me. I cannot reach them."

"You, miss, talk like that? Where is your dutifulness? And

after all that has happened! You have neither sense of propriety nor manners. Your mother——"

"My mother was a Gulliamy and a lady," blazed June.

"In Northumberland, perhaps."

"Northumberland knows a lady. You do not know what they say of you."

"Who is 'they'? Insolence!"

"The Ridleys, and the Swinburnes, and others."

"And what do they say?"

"It is better that you should not hear, ma'am."

"Tell me"—she seized the girl's wrist, her teeth set.

June spoke low, with eyes on the ground.

"They said that you made love to my father for his Court interest, and that you are the knowingest vixen between here and Alnwick. I don't know what they mean. I heard it in the stable-yard at Reedsmonth the day my father took me to George Swinburne's sale of yearlings. The one who spoke saw me suddenly, and Johnnie Clayton whistled and jogged Tom Ridley, and said, 'D'you think the pup has overheard'? and then my father came up."

For a moment Lady Mildred seemed paralysed by sheer amazement, and then she sprang at June like a wild cat.

"You little fiend, to listen to those dirty grooms."

"Let me go," pleaded June.

But blind with rage, Lady Mildred clung to the girl with one hand and beat her with the other claw-like white fist, all the sorry lines of her primitive emotions showing under the paint. The paroxysm lasted but a moment. Then the two leapt apart—June to shake herself free from the tigress mood, Lady Mildred to drop and sink down, like a withered aspen, on the seat under the mulberry-tree. June remained immobile, unaware that blood from a scratch on her hand was flowing on to her white dress. Presently Lady Mildred gathered up her skirts and went towards the house. She had regained her composure, and was stalking on tragically, when the door leading into the rosary, and thence into the western drive, opened, and the Squire ushered in two gaitered, brown-coated gentlemen.

"Hullo! my lady," he said; "not so fast. Here's Fenwick of Greyburn, and a friend, Mr. Heseltine of Downpatrick, who brings news from London. June—why, how's this? Have the ferrets been at you? What? What a slattern of a girl it is! Here, my lady, take her, and send her out in clean furbelows, and send us out beer, too, for I am in a heat with the merest stroll. Mildred, this Mr. Heseltine, whom you

already know, is a good Irishman, which, next to a good Northumbrian, is the best thing in the world. You've not heard the last of our friend here. We'll drink his fighting capacity and the Whigs. For me 'tis a strange mixture, sir"—he bowed genially to the stranger. "I'm for no Popery, but you're an honest fellow, and you may take your mummeries and your priests and welcome, so long as you want a clean rule for your country without the intervention of bribes."

The diversion was a Godsend. The deity of the household recovered herself, grateful for the absence of the rebellious June. She laughed to Mr. Frewin, and threw out all the allurements in her treasury to Mr. Heseltine. Having only the slightest notion of political affairs, she was shrewd enough to learn the catchwords of her husband's party. These she flashed on her guest with pretty deference from time to time; but lest he should set her down as too stern and Mrs. Montagu-ish, she prattled of frivolous matters in between. She sparkled, and Mr. Heseltine, quickly taking her lead, delighted her with many a *mot*.

"Ah!" said she, "you naughty men! 'Tis a pity you are Whigs," she said, "for the Queen is really in power; and the Prince, though, of course, he takes a deep interest in the emancipation of the Catholics, is dominated by that Hertford creature. Platonic! Nay, how Arcadian and sweet! Platonic, indeed!"

She cast up her eyes, and retired behind her fan.

"My lady," growled the Squire, "'tis well to leave such things unsaid," and presently he left the parlour with some noise.

Lady Mildred threw up her eyebrows, and, taking Mr. Heseltine's arm, floated on to the lawn, brimming with adorable coquettishness.

"My tame bear has had too much of the leash," she whispered. To which Mr. Heseltine bowed attention, and asked her with his cynical smile whether Beauty could not—like the princess of the old women's tales—liberate the Prince Charming that lay hidden in the bear. Whereat her ladyship said, "Fie, flatterer," and then, like every one else who came under Mr. Heseltine's raillery, fell to wondering whether an arrow lurked in his compliments.

While the Squire and his guests sat long over their wine, there came a hurried message to Mr. Fenwick saying that the Reed was in full spate, and that certain nets of his were likely to be swept away into the water of his arch-enemy,

Mr. Swinburne the younger, of Grimchase ; upon which the former, after being carefully steadied in his saddle, started off at a fast trot. When Mr. Heseltine, with their host, followed later, he came to a point where the ford, shallow but four hours since, was now impassable. To go by road meant a distance of fifteen miles, and it was almost dusk. Mr. Cherier, glad enough of the company of so entertaining a man, persuaded him to return to Juniper Hall for the night. Lady Mildred, her tantrums still smouldering, full of suppressed vituperation, and scandalised at the wooing that had been conducted under her aristocratic nose, prepared for her campaign with art. Fate was curiously propitious, for on the night of Mr. Heseltine's arrival her husband came into her room with a letter in his hand. He was full of his Irish guest, called him a "damned splendid fellow, with a gift of the gab, by Gad!" that he would like to dangle before that rascal Castle-reagh, who stuck in his speeches. He'd like, by Gad he would, to put up Heseltine opposite, and choke his lordship with eloquence. That would be a proper death for him—a Mark Antony could not wish for a better; and Theodore Hook should write the epitaph.

Then James George was recalled to dull common sense by the expression of his wife's thin lips and the lines about her forehead.

"A—nothing," she said satirically, in reply to his inquiry; "but you had better look after your girl. You know that she is a chit with neither reverence nor conscience, and the manners of a laundry-maid."

"That's a lie; and as for polish, 'tis a strange thing, madam, that you seem to have so little talent for teaching it. Now, no tears."

"You are brutal."

"Say what you have to say."

"Will you always be blind? You must send the girl away."

"That I'll not do."

"Then what is your intention? Will you marry her to a penniless boy, or to one of your yeoman tenants?"

"It is nonsense to talk of marrying—a mere child."

"It is not nonsense that she makes eyes at your own secretary. She is not a child; and she thinks only of the men."

"Lord! I can't barricade the house!"

"You can send her away, I say."

"I'll not have her punished. It is your doing, ma'am."

You should look after her better—pore less over your French fiddle-de-dees and memoirs. Read that.”

The letter that the Squire imparted to his lady was from his first wife's cousin, Lady Curragh, who wrote from County Down. It rallied him on his infrequent penmanship, asked him if he had forgotten his old friends, challenged him, as a good Whig, to visit the Distressful Country, inquired after his girl, asked whether she had blue eyes or brown, whether she had been sought after at balls, and had been to Court. It closed with an invitation to June to spend the early autumn at Castle Curragh, explaining that Mr. Heseltine, her friend, would provide an escort, if he himself must travel to Ireland before the girl could start.

To Lady Mildred the suggestion could not be bettered. Conway removed, June banished, she began to see a chance of coaxing the Squire south earlier in the season than usual, for she dreaded the gloomy northern winter.

CHAPTER VII

LOVE AND CONSPIRACY

MRS. HESTER's romantic teaching was an ill preparation for this inglorious crisis in the affairs of the daughter of the house.

Conway's silence was inexplicable. For twenty-four hours not a sign. Fierce, reckless, she would have taken her pony and ridden away into the world but, alas! for prose, the pony was being shod two miles off.

She slipped away to the beech fern glade where she and love had met so often in their unconscious intercourse. Here indeed was a place for love. Autumn flowers were marshalled in blues and purples at her feet. But love was gone, ignominiously chased, and she, called Queen of Love, was become an idle creature, to be dumped where its owners chose. She sank down on the moss and piteously held out her arms to the empty air with that theatricality so common in the very young and the very imaginative.

As in a miracle, love answered. Conway was beside her.

From a babel of wondrous alarms, passionate declarations, and warm caresses, June emerged like a bell-flower after rain. The distress of the sleepless night still showed, but in the other's eyes each was glorious.

“I waited,” she sighed, “and you rode past.”

Conway vowed his blindness to all the judgments of heaven

and fell to rolling up her mittens that he might kiss her arm where it creased delightfully at the elbow. Then she became shy and angry, opened her eyes with wonder at him and asked:

"Am I an infant to be fondled?"

"Yes," said Conway, "you are everything—goddess, woman, and child—June."

"There now, my snood has slipped."

The boy was holding her in his strong arms. She had read of such wonders as this—of a man's hand on a woman's heart, of a tender encompassing which besought that which it took.

It was very delicious, more delicate and marvellous than it was in books. She was glad that she was not one of Mrs. Hetty's heroines, whose lovers craved only the icy finger-tips of the adored one. More than this, the good woman had told her, touched the realm of mere ale-house courtship. This was a difficult matter. She stirred restlessly in Conway's arms. Could she ask him what ale-house lovers did?

"Is—is this right?" she said, looking into his face with awestruck eyes.

"What?"

"That—that you hold me so?"

"You do not hate me?"

"Oh, no."

"Then it is right."

She sighed with relief, and closed her tired eyes. Her hair rolled down slowly, and he kissed its warm shadows like a youthful epicure. The warm air enveloped them. His further hand played with hers.

There came a step through the leaves on the pathway below them.

"It is my father's guest," she said, as they sheltered behind a thick yew-tree on the steep wooded bank. "He will see us."

"You should not wear scarlet ribbons, dear; but never mind, he is only an old fogram. I met him at Hexham. He talks sometimes like a lawyer or a fellow of my college."

Though the danger died with the receding footsteps, June's peace was gone.

The boy began to twit her with her fears.

"When Wilson, the keeper, comes, he will lay me low for poaching."

"Oh! I heard what my father said. The disgrace!"

"It is not disgrace as long as you let me hold you like this."

"Oh! I am frightened," she said. "I am afraid. I must go."

"When will you come here again?"

She was the picture of despair.

"Oh! you do not know what they have contrived for me. I am to go to my cousin in Ireland."

"When?"

"We start for Port Patrick, papa and I, in two days, and he will take me all the way to the packet-boat."

The boy drew a deep breath.

"Listen to me. Can you slip out early in the morning in Mrs. Hetty's clothes?"

"She would know it."

"Then in Kitty's?"—Kitty was the dairy-maid.

He stooped and whispered. Not even the moss heard what he said. She recoiled slowly, but still with her hand in his. It was not possible to shape words yet.

Of the woods, and their beauty and spiritual presence, much has been said that is worth forgetting. The woods and their spirit triumph over words, and over all impose fences and boundaries. The breath of the earth escapes beyond us, and, if we will, envelops us. It feeds, it warms, it surrounds. Lovers know it, for their flame unites nowhere else so purely. To this hidden wood-spirit and its subtle working for good and evil is surely due the speed at which the passion of these two children flowed.

He moved away a little space, almost ashamed that his question should move her so. And she looked at him, and in her eyes he was a young god of the hills and valleys and streams, with radiance on his brow, and power and purpose in his hand. There was blood and race and beauty in him, and she loved it, seeing no further.

"Will you dare it for me?" he asked presently, fretting under her apparent coldness.

"But how?"

"To-morrow, when you go to Billingham market with your maid; on the way back through Heughside you can come to the chaplain's house. Look! I will go and see Mr. Hulse now. He will not dare to refuse."

The spirit of adventure leapt into her eyes, and her woman's pulses travelled blindly to him across the unknown country which sex contests with sex. Still she hung back, crying that his notion was utterly wild. Suddenly she turned to go, grasping at flight. Dim distrust was closing in upon her.

A bramble caught her dress. She cried out, thinking that it was some detaining hand, fell on her knees shaking, and called him in a whisper; and for the last time his youth won the day.

When the time came for the short parting which should lead to all that was tremendous, her thoughts sprang forward.

"Afterwards?" she whispered wistfully—"afterwards?"

Conway could not meet her eyes at once. Afterwards? He bit his lips in very rage at his inability to move in the matter like a man and a prince. There was enough to pay college bills long due, his fees to the Heughside chaplain, and his journey south, but not sufficient to plan a triumphant escape for the two of them. His voice shook with despair.

"I'll stop the stage before it reaches Port Patrick and carry you off."

"Now, do be reasonable."

"See here. It cannot be very long before I can claim you. You are generous—you are bold." He kissed her hands and face. "You do me great honour, and if you wish me to wait even longer than needful, I will wait."

"I am frightened."

She pushed him away.

Once more he drew her to him and whispered and asked for her promise; and it is impossible to say whether the spirit of the woods laughed or sighed as he heard it.

She crept home, on fire with adventure, rejoicing in the risk, fearless and intoxicated with youth, eager to draw the curtain from the face of Life.

CHAPTER VIII

JUNE CHERIER GOES ABROAD

THE scenes of that northern journey, the excitement of the hours that preceded it, that strange and breathless plighting, under the blinking eyes of Mr. Hulse, whose silence was secured by guineas and extravagant promises of preferment when Conway should come into his own, culminated at last in apathy, as June felt herself being carried further and further from the country-side she knew so well. At last the jogging and the bumping and the rattling were over, and the sea before her. Her childish mood returned when she stood finally on the deck of the sailing vessel and watched the brown-necked crew, and laughed at the struggles of the cattle as they were lifted on board. Mrs. Hester and the Squire had left her in the hands of Mrs. O'Gallon, the escort suggested by Lady Curragh. They found the good lady on board. She was effusive and maternal. Her stoutness and archness carried

all before them. With her was her daughter, the Honourable Mrs. Strutt, whom her mother introduced with an audible aside to the effect that "The sweet creature insists on attempting the voyage, though, as I have told her, it does not take spectacles to see that in her delicate state such a step is a tempting of Providence."

Mrs. Strutt, blushing deeply, begged to be excused from rising from the midst of her shawls, and implored June to take off her bodice instantly, as that was the only way, together with kerchiefs steeped continually in hartshorn and water and laid across the forehead, to keep away sickness. Finding the cabin redolent of such remedies, June made her way to the deck, and remained there till a late hour to watch the stars come out, much to the scandal of her double escort, and when she descended again, it was not to sleep. It was very wonderful, this moving, changing sea, this running of chains overhead, this breezy, manly atmosphere. Here was freshness and simplicity—no peculiar deference, no difference of status, no dulness. She wondered how Mrs. O'Gallon could slumber so comfortably, and watched covertly the airs and graces of the other woman and her maid with more interest than criticism. Mrs. Strutt had beauty, and she was young. June wondered what her husband was—whether he was tall, like Conway. Then a flood of reminiscence came upon her, with thoughts she could not face. Weariness returned, with the dislike and dread of the unknown, and she thought, with a stab, of the secretary's jealous assertion that her lover was not her equal. She knew the statement to be absurd, but she wished that there had been no secret in it all, and blamed first Conway and then herself, tossing from side to side with her doubts, groping for the pledge that hung on a silk thread round her neck.

Ah! there was light through the porthole. She slipped on her bonnet and wrap, and tiptoed towards the steps. She laughed as she found herself unable to climb steadily. She fell almost sprawling at the top on to a pile of tarred ropes. They were close to harbour. The morning wind was fresh in her face, the sun lay on the grey roofs of Donaghadee, and glorified all the coalers and the odd vessels that sheltered in the little port. When the time came for landing, her foot slipped slightly on stepping into the little boat that was to take the ladies ashore. She was thrown forward, and her gown was disarranged. She felt the trinket at her throat flap under her bodice; it was cold against her warm neck. It brought all the thoughts of the night back. If the silk thread were to

break ! She resolved she would carry that fateful circlet on a chain in future. Conway had told her that for the present she must not wear it on her hand, where he had placed it before Mr. Hulse.

At the quayside, porters screamed for the luggage. June followed her new acquaintances, and presently they entered a long, low room in the largest of the posting-houses, and ordered breakfast before the twenty-mile coach drive to Castle Curragh.

Mrs. O'Gallon was in the best of humours, having slept for nine hours with a peaceful conscience. She arranged everything, was overjoyed to be called "my lady" by the Pat that carried her packages from the boat, and only paused in her breathless chatter to scream maternal remonstrances to her harmless daughter, who lay in a beautiful pose on the settle. The wife of mine host, her hair tucked hastily under a nightcap and a cloak over her linen, stood listening deferentially, and offered her support to the good lady's ejaculations.

June opened her blue eyes wide, and looked on. This was a new phase of life. She was trying very hard to accommodate herself, but the blood rushed to her cheeks, and she could only stare. What manner of women were these, and what the mystery and the winks of the one and the *moues* of the other ? As for the tousled person in the nightcap, June wished her at the bottom of the deepest salmon-hole in the Tyne. The ribbon round her neck seemed to choke her. She leant back in her oaken chair, for the first time feeling utterly lonely. She did not care for the food before her. With a curt "You'll excuse me, madam," she went out into the porch of the inn.

"La ! my dear Miss Cherier, you must come in ; you must not stand at the bar door," cried her chaperon. "All the naughty young men in the place will be round us in a trice."

"I see only coal-heavers," said June over her shoulder, 'and they are so black I could never think of kissing them, Mrs. O'Gallon."

"Kissing ? Fie ! Monstrous, child !"

"I am not a child," said June, and strolled out into the sun, glad to feel defiance returning. She was certainly not a child—she felt that. The little gold thing round her neck confirmed it. "Tap, tap, tap," it went. "You are not June Cherier any more—your name is Mrs. June Dorren. Tap, tap, tap, tap."

She clutched the jewel almost fiercely, and looked across the inn yard, surrounded on three sides by a wooden gallery—a

fine place for watching cock-fights. A girl was hanging out coloured quilts over it. June thought the colours pretty. She drank in the scene as if to cheat herself from her thoughts, and the self-consciousness was chased away by the clatter of the great blue-and-black coach that slowly backed up to the archway leading into the posting yard.

Then a great bustle began. The whole place seemed to wake up. Heads were thrust out of windows; every dog in Donaghadee came to yelp and look on. Half-naked children, sleepy-eyed, tumbled out of the low doors, and sat munching bread on the steps. With many injunctions, and curtsies, and deferences, the innkeeper's wife packed Mrs. O'Gallon and Mrs. Strutt in their shawls in the inside of the cranky vehicle. June had mounted on the outside.

"I suffer from giddiness in a carriage," she explained, chuckling over her excuse; and she thought of Mr. Frewin's face the last time he had sat with his back to her ladyship's chestnuts.

"Tap, tap, tap," went the jewel.

The sun was up, and the air blew cold over the bare hills as the coach started, with much creaking and lurching, over the cobbles and into the open road, round the narrow corners that smelt of fish.

June drew her green silk spencer closely about her, and was even glad of the great muff which Mrs. Hester had insisted should be carried in her hand baggage. Her feet, nicely shod, rested on a tabouret, such as footmen carry for great ladies. The air sparkled, the mists rolled slowly away. The sea, when she caught sight of it as the road turned and twisted, was full of mysterious colour. If Conway had seen it, he would, she knew, have said, "That is the colour of your eyes." She wished Conway could see her now. She felt so great, perched up high on this throne, with the driver touching his hat, and the postboy blowing his best to please her; and at the inns where they stopped, all the men looked at her roguishly, and she thought she heard one of them say, "It is a gay morning, me dear," whereat she laughed in her big muff, and then lifted up her head and put her jaunty nose in the air and frowned. Round the corner of the last place of halt before they reached Lord Curragh's estates, a horseman clattered. He sprang off lightly and led his horse up to the inn door. Then he took off his cap and bowed to June. She was puzzled, but the deepening smile in the eyes jogged her memory. "The fogram," she ejaculated inwardly, remembering Conway's name for the cynical Irish stranger introduced by Mr. Fenwick on a certain

memorable evening, and she responded with what she intended to be great dignity. Mr. Heseltine saw only a pale girl, with an alert face, in a green coat, buried in furs. One long plume shadowed her shapely head, and her shoes were set upon an embroidered footstool. He had not thought Cherier's daughter so small. Just then Mrs. O'Gallon waved a fan out of the window with effusion.

"Ah! you, Mr. Heseltine? And what are you doing? You naughty agitator!"

He leant upon the door of the coach and made his courtesies, and she laughed a fat, jolly laugh, while her bonnet ribbons crackled.

"I am no agitator, madam," he said.

"Don't baulk me with your innocence, sir," laughed Mrs. O'Gallon. "Don't I know you? You go all over the country listening to all these craythurs."

"I, madam, am a craythur born and bred—do not forget that—though my estate would certainly fit comfortably inside St. Patrick's Church."

"Well, but you are a polite incendiary, you know."

"Will Miss Cherier speak for my respectability?"

"Lawks! you know Miss Cherier, then?"

"I had the honour of staying in her father's house a fortnight since."

"La! how strange! We're all bound for Castle Curragh."

"So am I. Her ladyship invites me in the name of philanthropy."

"You? We know you. You'd give the coat off your back to any mangy beggar that happened to fancy the cut or colour, and you'd think yourself flattered by such an exhibition of good taste—would he not, Amelia?"

Mrs. Strutt smiled, lay on her cushions, closing her eyes in a pretty languor.

"Indeed, you do me far too much honour, Mrs. O'Gallon," he rejoined. June suddenly divined the irony in the lines of his mouth. "We will thrash out these matters, with her ladyship as arbiter. Ladies, my horse is fresh; I shall greet you on our hostess's steps not an hour hence."

She watched him with interest as he rode away.

"He really is an old fogram," she thought to herself. "Why, there is grey in his hair."

Slowly the coach crawled up the broad, curving private road to a great grey stone house. The house was a surprise. This was not like Greyburn, or Heprood, or Clayton—moated feudal

fastnesses with loopholes and real battlements—but a great façade with gables and many windows. It was raised, and a noble flight of white steps led to the entrance. The gardens, square after square walled in, seemed to stretch away indefinitely along a slope, and a mile away to the right a tiny village clustered round a barn-like chapel.

On the steps, which were flanked by stone vases, stood a tall, fair woman in white, holding by the hand a boy of five or six. She wore no hat and carried no fan, but her head was partially in the shadow of the portico, and the sunlight, glinting on her cheek and chin, touched her shoulder and then flooded her figure down to her feet. She stood quite still as the coach drove up, smiling a little as the boy fidgeted with delight at the sound of the horn and the sight of the four brown horses. Her eyes were grey, her eyebrows inclined to be dark, and very slightly arched. Her nose was small and aquiline. Her mouth looked as if it could say humorous things; it was nearly always open slightly. Neither Lawrence nor Romney achieved a true portrait of her, for the one painted her without the light in her eyes, and the other persisted in presenting her with the mouth too firmly closed, which lent an arrogance that was entirely false, and foreign to her nature. The lower part of the face, to a superficial observer, inclined to a curious indecision; but it was the indecision of one who is ready to yield a contested point out of humility or self-abnegation, and not from inaction, indolence, or cowardice. As this lady greeted the newcomers, her eyes dilated very slightly and then her lashes hid their inner meaning again quickly. It seemed to June in a flash that here was a woman who did others high honour by taking them to her heart through her eyes in that single moment.

True to his boast, Mr. Heseltine strolled round from the stables, and assisted the party to alight. A girl in blue, with a head of frizzy auburn, fluttered down the steps. There was a babel of chatter as Mrs. Strutt was greeted by her younger sister, and, midst a chorus of "The sweet creature!" "How vastly that azure becomes you, my dearest sister!" "Such an exhausting voyage, darling Emma!" Mrs. Strutt was borne along with her devoted mamma to her apartment. After welcoming the other guests, Lady Curragh drew June up the steps.

"She is a kindly soul," she said to June, meaning Mrs. O'Gallon. "She delights in life, and never makes an enemy. Her tongue, if it tires, is never unkind. I hope it has not exhausted you? Let me look at you, child. You are a

Gulliamy, not a Cherier. I am afraid you will suffer in proportion. How cold your hands are! Why, they are as small as a child's. Denny, make a bow to your Cousin June."

"Will you play with me?" said the child.

"Yes," said June, kneeling on the floor so that she was level with him, and peeping at him through her muff.

The boy grew hilarious, then shy, and hid behind a chair.

"Give me a kiss, dear child," said her ladyship gently.

"Are you tired? Your eyes droop."

"A little, madam."

"My name is Molly. Come and rest. You must help me like a daughter. Curragh brings guests with him from Belfast, and Lord Castlereagh is here. You'll not like Curragh, but he is a good fellow, and my husband. You must look as fresh as a rose for me to-night. Oh, yes; you are a Gulliamy all over. The Gulliamys always look brilliant at night—a sure sign of blue blood. You think me frivolous? I am not a republican, my child. I think blue blood is the greatest thing in the world—greater than titles, or power, or lands. But it carries responsibility. What big eyes you have! Am I not a solemn old woman, to moralise like this? I'll send you my faithful old nurse. She's years younger than her mistress."

Again that dilating of the pupils, a tender pressure of the hand, and the door closed on her cousin.

June lay back dreamily in her seat, with a delicious sense of warmth, and security, and brightness. There was no specious fine-lady air about the woman who had just passed out. The very sweep of her silken skirts carried with them a regal breadth, an open-air freshness and geniality, which never characterised the trailings, and swerings, and floatings of the draperies of a Lady Mildred. For the first time in her life June felt the meaning of kinship. She seemed to understand the slim, gracious woman with the *bel air*, to divine the train of her thoughts, the meaning of the turn of her head, the nobility of her face. The girl looked at the walls of the room and thought them beautiful, patterned with their birds and fruits. She looked at the hills beyond, through the long, narrow windows, and at the pigeons on the lawn below. She walked about the room and caught sight of herself in a long mirror, and wondered who the girl was in the gay plumed hat, then rejoiced to think herself so modish, and in her heart was grateful to Lady Mildred. She curtsied to the glass and smiled.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT THE ROOF OF CASTLE CURRAGH HELD

AT dinner, June found herself seated next to Lord Curragh, where, in joke, he had placed her as guest of honour and his kinswoman.

"For all the world as if you were a bride," giggled Miss O'Gallon, not without tartness, while June's ring trembled at her throat.

She watched the face of her cousin's husband closely. Ejaculatory, but kind, he turned again from his talk with a much-jewelled beldame on his right—the great Lady Catherine Andrews, of betting proclivities—to ask June how the Squire's turnips had fared, and whether his mutton found grass enough on the Tyne fells. When June said she could ride, he flickered into enthusiasm, and said he had a fine mare upon which she should try her hand. The meal ended, the ladies walked out in strict order of priority, and speedily lost themselves in a long vista of reception rooms decorated in the French manner. June—silent, watchful—waited in pleasant unconcern. My lady fetched her tambour and set to work. Miss O'Gallon was busy cutting trifles of coloured paper. Lady Catherine Andrews, her lace lappets cocked over one eye, hobnobbed with a Mrs. Cowley, less meagre, but quite as redoubtable as herself. The two shared a gold snuffbox. Some one entreated a young lady with bluish-black ringlets and a frilled frock to sing. She protested she had "a hoarseness."

"Miss Sterne dances beautifully," said her chaperon, Mrs. Cowley. "She has studied with Della Bocca, who admired her poses to distraction."

The girl with the ringlets twisted her taper fingers in and out of her hair, and tucked her oval face into the hollow of her dimpled white shoulder, looking out of the corners of her eyes. She had very pretty teeth.

"Can you dance the new reel?" said Miss O'Gallon. "Oh! that would be delightful. And do you go to Almack's? La! how lovely! Do show me the steps!"

"They say Lady Conyngham's petticoats at Almack's are far too skimpy," said the stout lady, with the satisfied air of the scandal-maker. "Miss Sterne, my love, show us those steps that Della Bocca invented for you. My dear Lady Curragh, he vowed she was a born dancer."

"Do dance, Miss Sterne," said Lady Curragh, with her pretty

air of invitation. "But of course you must have music. Miss Troomer, will you help us? The pianoforte is open."

And with more blushes, and twiddling of her raven curls, and delicious shruggings of her white shoulders, Miss Sterne rose from her seat on the divan, glided into the middle of the floor, and gathered up her embroidered scarf for action, while Miss Troomer, a little old lady in stiff plum brocade and spectacles, delightedly strummed the first bars of a fashionable air at the further end of the room.

Then what swimmings and swirls, and duckings and jumps, took place!

"Beautiful!" cried Miss O'Gallon, and "Divine!" croaked Lady Catherine.

"You are indeed agile," exclaimed the hostess at each successive feat of lissomeness.

Encouraged by this undisguised admiration, the young lady leapt higher and higher, and swung her scarf into a thousand loops, from which she extricated herself and her sandals with the utmost dexterity.

"Angiolini, by Gad!" cried a voice, and a gentleman who had been peeping over a screen near the door came forward to hand the exhausted performer to a seat.

"Prying, Sir Arthur?" asked the ingenious Mrs. O'Gallon.

"Indeed not," said the sprightly youth; "no such sacrilege was in my mind. I came all unawares upon this exhibition of celestial grace. See, my lord"—he turned to Castlereagh—"what you have missed."

Miss Sterne was implored to repeat the performance, but the host and his two brothers, Geoffrey and Denis Trowle, had already brought up a card-table.

With a bobbing of plumes and a rustling of laces, Lady Catherine Andrews and Mrs. Cowley gathered round the cards, the two last with the air of practised tacticians. Miss Troomer was also all alertness, but modestly waited till Geoffrey invited her to take a hand, and then she settled down with many chirrups and twitters.

The rest were in groups about the room, and Sir Arthur Greene, after teasing the little old lady, was finally captured by Lord Castlereagh and carried off to an alcove for chess.

June enjoyed it all from her seat in a stiff old chair. She could watch her cousin working under the lamplight, she could see the rubicund face of Molly's spouse disposing itself for slumber in a corner, and now she caught a glimpse of his brother's visage, duller and less genial, behind the not undainty

nut-cracker profile of Miss Troomer, who laughed with a child's glee when the luck came her way. The players grew absorbed. The game seemed to resolve itself into a fight between the two gossips. Surely no mountain-hawk ever watched its prey as this beak-nosed dame watched Mrs. Cowley, and never did a torpid slow-worm regard its natural enemy with more obvious distrust than the latter, as she followed the movements of her adversary.

June suddenly espied that Mr. Heseltine, too, was a spectator. She glanced back to the table at the same moment that Mrs. Cowley laid down a knave of diamonds, and Lady Catherine darted an ominous look at her opponent.

"Let me see," said Geoffrey ponderously. "The knave? Why, the knave was played when——"

"You are keeping us all waiting," laughed Miss Troomer. "I am dying for a *coup*."

"I am afraid Mr. Trowle's memory is short," said the hawk-nosed one to Mrs. Cowley.

"It is so easy to forget a little detail of that kind, my dear Lady Catherine," replied the slow-worm calmly, but she clutched a little nervously at her turban, which trembled.

June's lips formed themselves into a round "O." As she lifted her eyes from the comedy to Mr. Heseltine, she found that he was looking at her, and his eyes said "Silence."

Presently he strolled casually round to her, and leaning over the table, played with some miniatures as he talked.

"Did you see that?" she asked.

"Nothing that I ought not to see, Miss Cherier."

"She—she——"

"Yes, she wins. What of that?"

"But if a man cheats, it is a case for swords."

"A lady, however, may do this with impunity."

"That is wrong."

June's eyebrows looked very straight and her mouth hardened. Mr. Heseltine shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, no! Call it by a lighter word. These good creatures have few ambitions. It pleases them to win advantages from each other, no matter what the means. Why, Miss Cherier, you look quite fierce."

"I should like to throw the cards in their faces," she whispered.

"Such a sin is nothing compared with the frauds that are condoned in my own sex, madam."

"Now I think you are laughing at me."

She drew back, putting her hands behind her.

"I was never further from it. Pardon me, we are growing too serious. But you will see the world ; you will learn many things that make you indignant. Indignation is, I take it, one of your talents. You will find many a Phyllis much too true to her worthless Strephon, and no one to call him out over the matter. These playful crones here play with cards, but they break no hearts. You cannot do better than follow their example."

He smiled cynically.

"Oh ! you talk nonsense to me. Do you think I want fine speeches ? Go and make them to Miss O'Gallon."

She turned away in a pet, and began to pore over an album ; but she could not help listening to the conversation between her cousin and the "fogram."

A servant entered with a packet for her ladyship. She read it quickly, then glanced across to Lord Castlereagh, who sat at chess with Sir Arthur Greene.

"Advise me," she said to Mr. Heseltine, and drew him away from the rest to the other side of the curio-table at which June sat.

"What is it ?"

"Here is George Canning at Belfast, and his wife with him, and they propose to spend some days with us, for, as you know, there has been a long understanding that they should give us news of their travelling in these parts. And here is Lord Castlereagh. The two have scarcely met in private since that silly affair on Wimbledon Common. I cannot turn his lordship out, but George Canning is my oldest friend."

"Let him come," said Mr. Heseltine ; "it will make your ladyship the most talked-of woman in society."

"You are a fool, Stephen Heseltine, to flourish that kind of stuff in my face, when you know it is not of the slightest matter to me whether the *Advertiser*, or the *Courier*, or the *Post* publishes my household doings in scarlet, or passes them over in lofty silence. That which is of moment to me is the harmony of my circle. My roof must be a place of peace, a pleasance, not a meeting-ground for factions and private grudges. If it were not so, Mr. Heseltine, you would not be here."

She made him a pretty mock courtesy.

"Then face it boldly, my dear lady, and tell Lord Castlereagh that. He will be all condescension, having the upper hand and some years of success to smooth over things. It is Mr. Canning who will have to swallow the black draught with a grin."

"And you, most sphinx-like of Irishmen, will revel in all this."

"Certainly. It is not always that your ladyship provides such rare comedy."

She left him and swept slowly over to Lord Castlereagh when she saw him push back the chess-board.

"I have come to ask how you will pass to-morrow," she said with a tremulous smile. "Curragh has kept the choicest bit of moor for the last day of your visit to us. It is some distance, but makes a fine ride on a sunny morning, or if you will not ride, you shall drive. I would myself escort you, but a sudden arrival detains me." Her voice rose a little as if she tried to assure herself to her courage. "Some business connected with his handful of land in Kilkenny has brought Mr. Canning and his wife, my old play-fellow Joan, over here. He has but this moment written to say that for various reasons he is posting here sooner than he expected, and expresses a wish to see us, arriving about noon to-morrow. I do not know whether I shall prevail upon him to stay, and it is for this reason that I am unable to stray beyond the gardens to-morrow morning; but Mr. Heseltine has my orders to entertain you, should you not care to shoot."

Her guest cleared his throat slightly.

"Your ladyship has so many sweet suggestions for my divertisement," he replied formally, "that I am bewildered. Our friend Mr. Heseltine, here, is a fund of all things edifying and exhilarating. With your permission I will give myself into his charge. He is a good fencer in converse, and you will not deny us the luxury, which office cannot bring, of arraying our opinions one against the other without fear of public comment." He hesitated, and then resumed: "I trust that Mr. Canning's business is not of so pressing a nature that he cannot wait to exchange a greeting with me also."

Mr. Heseltine afterwards told his hostess that this speech was the longest ever made by the statesman, and, as if slightly exhausted by so sustained an effort, his lordship seated himself with deliberation.

Lady Curragh's relief showed itself in her playful tone.

"You must not talk too long of party matters, my lord," she said, holding up her finger; "this is your vacation. I know Mr. Heseltine's glib tongue too well. These Celts can skewer a poor simple woman like myself with epigram, and bind her hand and foot in a discussion even ere they have doffed their hat in greeting."

"I once saw two snakes trying to swallow one another, Molly," murmured Denis, who had strolled up to them; "and as his lordship is a Celt too——"

This rare pleasantry, whatever it may be, was lost in the

sudden opening of a long window next to June, the catch of which had burst with the draught.

Stephen Heseltine rose to shut it, and Lady Curragh moved towards him at the same moment. A sign passed between them. June was about to escape on to the balcony, but they were before her, and tact kept her in her seat. She wondered what her pretty cousin could have to say to a man who was so little *galant*, so apparently cool in his comments, so lacking in the impulse which had delighted her in her boy lover.

And while the chatter of the rest of the company merged in a general babble, the voices outside the window became distinct.

"Did you hear him?"—the eager voice was that of the lady. "He will meet George as a friend now——. Oh! I know it is too late for explanation. But it was well done and gently said of my Lord Castlereagh. I was at my wits' end how to put it to him, and proud enough not to tender him the chance of shortening my old friend's visit, if he should wish to avoid George; for my sympathies have always been with George. You know it. And yet Lord Castlereagh is a man in high authority—and a gentleman, which means more to me than his statesmanship, and though he made a monstrous bungle in Holland, George should have been less fiery in opposition, less secret in his methods."

"I fear Mr. Canning was born with a fatal genius for brilliancy, madam."

"Too many theories for success."

"Yet without that we should have no Canning. See how his statecraft is constantly playing counter to his conscience. He must either obey conscience altogether or play for prosperity. The man is a tragi-comedian. You know him. Ask yourself, will he ever follow up success in the common sense of the word? You know he will not—because he is George Canning, great and genial, Quixotic——"

"Who are you to talk of 'Quixotic,' sir? The whole world is shaking its head over you."

"The world is pleased to be absurdly exercised over nothing, madam."

"But it is true that you have mortgaged all your land for the sake of the purse of a certain Royal lady?"

"Does the world say so? The world is for once accurate."

"You are a child, Stephen Heseltine. Apart from the foolishness of begging yourself, you expose yourself to serious misconstruction."

Mr. Heseltine laughed gaily. There was no cynicism here, June thought to herself.

"Every one who comes into touch with Caroline of Brunswick must pay his toll in that direction, my dear madam."

"Are you well advised?"

In the faint light outside, June saw Molly Curragh lay her hand in entreaty on his arm.

Mr. Heseltine bowed.

"You a woman, my lady, and yet ask me this?"

Lady Curragh spoke eagerly:

"As a woman and a friend I ask you before you hesitate in so difficult a path. It is because I am a woman that I ask you, without blushing, if—if the object of your chivalry is worthy that sacrifice of your life, your enterprise. Ireland wants you——"

"Ireland has little work for me so long as he"—he pointed to Lord Castlereagh—"feels a man's pulse with gold under his thumb."

"That our poor Princess needs help, I am sure. George Canning cherishes for her far more than the ordinary deference of an official to such a person. Yet, Stephen, I cannot frame the question I would ask, and I care too much for your good name and your friendship to let you squander your love——"

June was strangely moved. Breathless, spellbound, she listened, without knowing that she listened. Through the gauze curtain she could see Mr. Heseltine's face, the light of the lamps falling on it through the window. There was now none of the anger that overshadowed it at Lady Curragh's first question. He answered her deliberately, with a brightening of the eyes.

"You are too great and gracious to impute to me a foolish romanticism for the sake of—effect. A Heseltine does not rush into the face of fate for the sake of glory. Ask yourself what glory there is in such a service."

"There is more than glory to tempt you, Stephen."

There was a silence. June, agog with surprise and wonder, listened for the reply. When he spoke, the old light irony she had learnt to discern so quickly was once more in his voice.

"You are quite right; there is more than mere glory."

The other turned away in some irritation.

"If there is neither glory nor gain, then there is only one reason left; and yet that is impossible."

June trembled with curiosity.

"You may tell all who are inquisitive that I have a hundred

reasons for every step, but that my aims can be told on the fingers of one hand. I am sworn to support Mr. Grattan, and to help to stamp out all who can be bought over to serve either on his side or the other. Where I cannot do this I have my own private business. You have named it. The Princess of Wales is a butt for the wits of Carlton House. Her husband's archmistress goes to Court, while his wife is banished from Pall Mall to Kensington, from Kensington to Blackheath. And why?"

"Oh! do not let us speak of it. Let us believe the result of that sad trial years ago before the House."

"So you comfort yourself with that legal pronouncement? It would seem that for a woman the hall-mark of virtue is the dogged conclusion of twelve men."

"I have grieved you?"

"Forgive me. I was thinking, not of your slender trust in the virtue of the Princess, but of other matters you have no chance of judging rightly. She is desperately unwise, incautious; but she is a maddened creature, and among the men and women about the Court who know her sorrows, there is scarce one who does not backbite her in order to secure favour with her husband. She is lonely—God! how lonely! Look up"—he pointed to an open oriel in the angle of the left wing, whence there came the crooning of a slumber song. "Look. There, my lady, is your heart's delight, sleeping. The light in his eyes is new every morning; his mouth is warm; his fragile hands, when they do not cling to your neck, clutch fearlessly at life; his feet—have you not crushed the rosy soles of them to your lips many a time? Caroline of Brunswick had such a child once." He paused and spoke lower. "It was a shameful bridal. In the bitterness of her soul, child as she is, she has unsealed her lips. All her confidantes are not discreet. In days to come, every woman who hears of it will stand paralysed at the cold-blooded bestiality which the Church unconsciously sanctioned when it brought the staggering Regent to the side of this sad lady."

Lady Curragh's answer was a sigh that was almost a sob. She looked quickly up at the glimmering oriel.

"Heaven help all such women, Stephen! The strange and wonderful thing in such a case is the child. Its purity is one of the greatest miracles of life."

"And it was all the joy that Caroline of Brunswick knew—till they took the little maid away."

"I know—I know."

"They are trying to force her to go abroad. The Prince cannot divorce her, though his spies dog her everywhere for the slightest trace of an indiscretion which may give him sufficient excuse once more to drag her before the bar of the House of Lords. Just now he cannot move in the matter. The people would not stand it. Moreover, he wishes Parliament to pay off a fresh batch of his debts. Again, the Princess stands between the nation and her child, who will one day be Queen. One scurrilous illustrated pamphlet likened her to a charlatan's Columbine, standing on foot in the centre of a see-saw, with John Bull at one end and her daughter at the other. Vile as the picture is, it hits true. So long as young Princess Charlotte remains at one end of the plank, Caroline, Princess of Wales, engages the interest of English men and women. At a word from her, London would attack Carlton House and flog the sots that foregather there."

"But she will not suffer it?"

"I trust there will be no need. This is not the moment for any kind of demonstration. Princess Charlotte is young and defiant. She and Grandmamma, the old Queen Charlotte, will have a fight, depend upon it."

"And you? What is to become of you in this affair, when you have squandered your little all in your own strange way?"

"Now, my lady, would you not like me to go and pester Castlereagh this instant for some well-paid sinecure?"

"No, I have no belief that you will do anything half so sensible, most foolish, hot-headed Celt," sighed the lady.

The speakers re-entered the room so suddenly that June started, thinking they would find her in the guilty attitude of an eavesdropper, but Lady Curragh put her hand caressingly on the girl's head before she took up her tambour again. A momentary silence in the room was broken by a grunt from Geoffrey Trowle and a gentle clapping of Miss Troomer's hands. The rubber was over. Curragh yawned loudly. The winnings, a casket of sugar-plums (for Lady Curragh would not allow more serious gambling in a mixed company), were handed to Miss Troomer.

The little old lady, laughing softly, swept the comfits into a rose-coloured bag that hung at her waist. She explained that she cherished them on behalf of her brother Cornelius, murmuring apologetically that "Corney was mighty fond of a swate."

June, as she gazed on the scene, could scarcely believe that she had just looked at a life tragedy as through a peep-show.

Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Canning at Play 55

The candles glowed softly against the panelled white walls; the wood floor mirrored the delicate curves of the slender furniture, the china bowls, the portraits, even the satin-wood garlands in a great cabinet, and the pale dresses of the younger women, each like shades of an opal.

CHAPTER X

LORD CASTLEREAGH AND MR. CANNING AT PLAY

JUNE came down to breakfast the next day brimful of excitement. As she watched Mr. Heseltine later from the terrace above the bowling-green, he seemed to her a most arch intriguer—a kind of genteel terror, half a bogey, half a reckless schemer. Up and down the malachite turf he strolled, with the statesman he hated so frankly beside him, and the two kept pace, though Lord Castlereagh trod carefully as if he were on a hustings or in Pall Mall. Up and down on the terrace above them strutted two others, her ladyship's blue cranes—rare, proud creatures. It was not easy to feed them unless they knew their mistress, and June, holding the bowl of grain in her arm, crept slowly up to them. It was so long ere she could coax them to eat from her hand, that she did not hear the sounds of arrival on the other side of the Castle. Then a white scarf in cool shadow caught her eye. The murmur of voices below ceased suddenly, and both men turned their heads towards the grass steps that led from the upper rose-garden to the lawns.

The Gothic balustrade of the terrace on which June stood was of lichened stone, all ivy-grown, and the parapet was heightened here and there by a great stone ball. At these points it nearly reached the top of June's head. She stooped, and looked through the ivy-hung interstices of the balustrade without fear of being seen. She held her breath, for she had been taught by Conway to look on Mr. Canning as a hero, and there surely he stood by the side of her cousin. It was the face she had seen in a print in Lady Curragh's morning-room—the same broad forehead and sensitive lips, the same brilliant light in the eye, the thin, curved bridge to the nose, the spare shoulders, the easy posture. He was talking to Lady Curragh, whose eyes were on the ground as she came down the steps. As they passed round a large dial and came on to the green, she stopped abruptly. If she had been closer, you would have said she started. Then Mr. Canning said a word to her and she turned, and, waving her hand, swept once

more up the steps slowly, while her guest began to cross the green with a quick nervous gait. June drew in her breath. She had a confused sense that this was a Meeting. The scraps she had heard from the talk of the previous evening between her cousin and Mr. Heseltine thronged into her mind. These two men on the bowling-green were great statesmen. They had fought—perhaps with tangible weapons. She hoped they would now spring upon each other like lions. She quivered again, and stealthily drew away more of the ivy trails. Then she noticed with a sigh of bitter regret that no one present wore swords, and that Lord Castlereagh smoked a segar. The only weapon among the three was Mr. Heseltine's riding-whip. Mr. Canning was now close. He came on courageously, and held out his hand, doffing his hat with great formality. His enemy faltered, moved forward a few steps, stood hat in hand. Then the two greeted one another in silence. A lesser-minded man than Canning would have blurted out a commonplace, or covered a difficult moment with a blustering jest.

Mr. Heseltine had kept his place some paces apart, apparently busy with the lash of his whip, but as the two gripped hands, his head was lifted in an instant and a look of keen irony and humour darted over his face. Then he, too, came forward, rendering his expression as impassive as that of Castlereagh, and it was he that supplied the platitudes, till the former, who kicked a ball accidentally with his foot, turned stiffly to ask if Mr. Canning would play bowls with him first and pledge him afterwards in a glass of my lord's Madeira. Geoffrey and Denis, coming upon them, offered to advise impartially on the lie of the green, knowing every square inch of the clover and the stubbornness of unexpected humps by heart. Mr. Heseltine, in whose eyes the smile deepened, mounted the terrace. June turned slowly, and then, stooping, began to gather the corn which had fallen from her basket.

"You are watching a most interesting comedy, madam," said Mr. Heseltine, mockingly she thought. "You have my sympathy. You have seen that which all the pamphleteers, and both sides of both Houses, would give their eyes to see, and what a Rich or a Vanbrugh would realise instantly with all the resources of stage-craft. It is far more amusing than ministering to the material needs of these fantastic creatures."

He pointed to the birds which stood at bay at the further end of the terrace.

"That is quite true," she said, smiling, "but you see I had more reason than you think. Mr. Canning is much admired

of a young gentleman with whom I am acquainted, and I was dying to see if he is as admirable as my friend declares him, and whether he is a man to love also. And the balustrade was in the way, so I peeped through the ivy."

"Then let me tell you you have seen your friend's hero at the most trying moment of his life. I hope he may never have a worse."

"Will they fight now?"

"Fight? Bless the saints, no! It is a long history, with which you need not stuff your young head. Mr. Canning is the better man of the two. Once he made a mistake. He wished to remove a serious obstruction in what he honestly held to be the progress of the nation's policy abroad. That stone in the path was Castlereagh. Every one else concerned knew it too. They determined on removing the obstruction by quick methods. Mr. Canning's patience was exhausted. The quick method was accounted not honest dealing with the obstruction—my lord there—who resented it. The authorship of these methods was brought home to Mr. Canning. There was a little fight one evening on a certain heath, a little honourable blood (from Mr. Canning's shoulder) was spilt, and George Canning has retired into private life for the present. It is certainly five years ago, but in State matters he can carry no weight. He will turn his back upon England for a while, perhaps immediately. Now he comes here to spend a holiday and to see his friends and finds his obstruction. But did you see how he faced the position?" June gazed with fascination into his face. "Any one would imagine that Castlereagh were the culprit, the vanquished, the man in abeyance. He stood like a schoolboy that dreads a birch. And Mr. Canning—did you see?" Again she nodded, like a child listening to a fairy tale. The speaker went on, as if to himself: "That is where George Canning wins. He may make ten thousand mistakes, he may sacrifice all his fortune to an heroic conception, he may spoil a splendid piece of eloquence with almost prudish nicety and brilliance, but you cannot buy him, and you cannot move him, by the weight of the opinion of many men of authority and position. He will never float down stream, however exhausted he may be. He will swim his own way to the last; and if he reaches the first seat in the Government, I tell you it will be in spite of his attitude towards everything, and not because that place of honourable activity is his winning-point. Castlereagh knows it, and that is why he is at a disadvantage even now. Look at them."

She leant upon the balustrade and looked over, aware that Mr. Heseltine was now watching her.

Lord Castlereagh was playing recklessly. He might have been deaf for all the use that Geoffrey's prompting was to him.

"Crack an egg on the back of that, sir," cried Denis to Canning—"a hedge-sparrow's."

And Canning, after a moment's cool deliberation, took aim delicately, and lightly tapped his partner's bowl nearer to the jack.

Denis leapt into the air.

"George, you are a god!" he cried.

But the luck was not always good. Geoffrey's pupil made headway presently, and three of Mr. Canning's bowls rolled wide of the mark.

"My arm is stiffening slightly," he said, laughing.

"Faix, I'll run to Molly for a bandage," said Geoffrey, roaring at his own joke.

The blood leapt up into Canning's face, but he said nothing, and Lord Castlereagh's next bowl might have been thrown by the hand of a baby.

June looked quickly into Mr. Heseltine's face. He was gripping his riding-cane, and his lips were contemptuous. Then he began to laugh to himself at the by-play between the Trowles, for Denis was quick to make his brother understand his clumsiness.

"What does it mean?" said June, still as fascinated as one listening to some tale of ancient romance.

"It means that when one oaf sets himself to cuff another for being an oaf, the onlooker dips his fingers in the salt of the earth. The world is too stubbornly bent on seriousness, which is mostly tragedy. Let us sigh with relief."

She shrank back. The romance of the world had given place to burlesque. It was as impertinent as if some one had beaten a toy drum in your face.

CHAPTER XI

TWO LOVE-LETTERS

FROM MR. CONWAY DORREN, AT OXFORD, TO MISS CHERIER,
AT CASTLE CURRAGH.

"MY HEART,—

"It would be right to say 'My Wife,' but the other word is better suited to tell you of the Fire that burns in my breast on the Altar that is sacred to you. I wake early—*Me*

two longas pereunte noctes Lydia dormis—and your face pursues me all through the day. I see you glancing from out my Horace, and lurking in the folds of the dusty gown which that terrible Bore, my Principal, wears at Chapel and lecture. I am always moody, and hate the people and things about me. In moments of great joy at the thought that you are my Possession, I count myself a fool in that I do not make these quadrangles ring with your name, and throttle the gownsmen with their own neckbands, and lay foot-snare for the plump Dean who passes me with a bland ‘Good morning, Mr. Dorren.’ But since this would be of no avail, I cannot chuse but control myself. My room is become a Paradise for thoughts of love. Meanwhile I comfort myself as well as I can.

“Martin (Charles Martin), who has a pretty trick of poetry, read me yesterday a masque he has written in the style of Pope. In this is told the sad love history of Felicia and Coryn. Felicia, a beauty beloved of Coryn, was by him borne off to the mountains, where he besought her for her love; but Felicia, who liked not the chilly airs of those upper regions, only wept for the plains and for the Pleasure of the Court. He, chiding her for this love of fleshpots, sings a song, which I have set to music. While Felicia hides and weeps and Coryn seeks her in vain, there passes by him a troop of maidens wreathed for a festival in honour of the mountain god, Rotas. Tarrying by the way to comfort the youth, each one becomes enamoured of him, and Coryn, finding solace, shows his gratitude. Now Felicia, dreading solitude more than the addresses of Coryn, discovers herself neglected, and goes forth haughtily to see why no allegiance is forth-coming. She calls, and no voice answers. Suddenly there is a great crashing of thunder and rocks, and the god Rotas stands before her, and commands her to drop a certain juice on the forehead of the wanton maidens, so that they shall wither, and Coryn shall fly them in disgust; and Rotas clothes the lady in a queen’s garments and sends her forth. She comes to the place where her lover lies, and, stooping, kisses him and calls him by name. He springs up, overjoyed, and would follow her to the world’s end; but now that she has him once more in thrall she treats him like a bonds slave, putting him to all the most dangerous and pitiful tasks, and Rotas, full of pity, cuts short his woe with a timely bolt. Then Felicia learns all too late the devotion of her swain, and lies stiff on the mountain, a frozen cloud-wraith.

"Is it not a moving tale? The woes of Coryn are told with such tragic mastery that they pierce even my joyous heart, and I entreat Martin to show more mercy towards the lover; but he will have it that tragedies are in fashion, and that Melancholy holds more romance than Happiness. But then he is a dreamer and a man who has not loved as I love you. I think of you as Felicia the splendid; but I cannot see you as Felicia the cold, nor attach to myself so little cunning in winning your love anew, and yet anew, as Coryn. And the rose-wreathed maidens are an absurdity.

"With all these fantastics do I entertain myself and try to choke my hunger of love. And yet the Hunger is sweet. Write to me most secretly, for Love is always secret. Your picture is where you sewed it (in my breast-pocket), and your features burn into my heart. You must have news—much news; but write to me only of yourself, and do not forget to tell me what you wear, that I may picture you as a grand lady. I kiss you and kiss you. O Diana, how cold is this sheet of crisp white note on which I write! It is as prim and crackling as the skirts of Mrs. Hester. Write, write. Nay—do not write. I am a-fire, and the sight of your writing will set all Oxford in a glare. I am as one of the Gods—a wretch, an ash-heap, a salamander, everything from one end of the scale to the other—and

"Yours.

"How long must I wait for you; how long?"

FROM MISS CHERIER, IN IRELAND, TO MR. CONWAY
DORREN, AT OXFORD.

"MY DEAREST CONWAY,—

"You must not indeed think I do not echo your passion because I did not write *the instant* as my heart prompted me. And do you know that I have never written such a letter as this, and tremble in thinking that, against your beautiful and polished expressions, my little sentences look *very doppelty*, as Mrs. Hester says. But at least I can spell, my Father says—and oh! you naughty Con, there is no 'u' in choose. But, dearest, do not write Latin as you did in your letter, or if you do this, put the English at the side, for how do I know else that you are not betraying me and perhaps preaching love to some other object, or, worse still, saying naughty Latin jests? You know you said all Latin jests are not repeatable.

"Your friend Martin must be monstrous clever to write like Pope, but I am glad you scold him roundly for making a black

ending to his romance. For truly it was not gentle behaviour to carry a lady so delicately constituted to the mountains. My Mamma would certainly say that it was not *le bon ton*. Yet in romance these wonders happen without reproof. Now do confess Coryn was most ungallant. I, like Felicia, should certainly have stuffed my knuckles into my eyes and roared for the Pleasures of the Court. I should have put Coryn to even harder tasks, and slain those rose-wreathed demoiselles. But why do I dwell on adventures so imaginary when ours are so real? The journey here was vastly wearisome, but I could have supported it with glee if I had not been so guarded by a great gurgling, smiling featherbed of a woman, a Mrs. O'Gallon, and her married daughter, whose airs would just suit her stepship. The sea terrified me not at all, though it was not smooth between the two havens. We arrived here by coach on a fine fresh morning. On the way I had sometimes a fine wish to flourish your pledge in their foolish faces and jump up and down and cry, 'I am married, I am married. Thanks for your excellent escort, but I am a child no longer.' However, the caution you had enjoined kept my lips tight shut.

"How can I answer your question, 'How long?' You are a man, dearest, and know best, for I am so ignorant and unwise that I cannot see before me more than a few days. Oh! you will do splendid things, will you not, at Oxford? How proud I am in thinking of it! Oh! when shall we meet in the happy woods again? Quick, quick!—bring those days back, for it was only then that I felt secure and safe. Yet perhaps we shall next meet in London, when I shall have to drive out with Mamma, though I promise you that I *will not sit* on that back seat any longer. And then you will pass on a prancing horse and a glance from your eye to mine must content us until—How long? Surely 'tis for you to say?"

"You ask me what I wear. Lilac and gold—the colour of the sunset, as you would say, though it is only an old bombazine belonging to Mamma, and some sweet wild yellow flowers which Geoffrey Trowle gave me. Be jealous, I implore you, for he is my Cousin Curragh's brother, and he follows me about like a dog when he is not busy otherwise. The great clumsy creature has made it a matter of duty to fall in love with me. It is delicious. He has red hair. They are a strange family. But Cousin Molly is an angel of sweetness, and so friendly. The 'Fogram' is actually here, and he is so moral and quizzical, and full of conspiracies, they say. I wish I knew them. But he worships my cousin, and that unites us when we quarrel.

He said to me last night, pointing to her and Curragh (fast asleep, as usual after dinner), 'The difference between them is that my lord hangs his coronet out of his pocket on the corner of his handkerchief, and my lady carries hers on her brow wherever she goes.' I liked him for saying that; it is very true. The Viscounty is only a hundred years old, after all. How 'twould all rouse my Father's humour! But I must tell you about Master Geoff, to assuage your jealousy. Truth is, I am so weary of his groanings and die-away grimaces that I lured him yesterday into the exotic house. He followed me, smiling all over his red face. I murmured to him to look at a beautiful passion-flower overhead, and then, while he gazed rapturously upward, I squeezed the entire contents of a plump grape into his ear and ran away. He abhors me now, but I am safe, for he dares not tell the rest how he was fooled. Now, are you jealous?

"But I am forgetting all the manly gossip that will fire your political ardour. For know, my dearest Con, that Mr. Canning is here, and his wife too; and Lord Castlereagh, who is gone, is a most engaging gentleman, and very great, I am sure. There is a great deal about them which I cannot put here, for lack of room. Lord C. has himself franked this wrapper to you, which I told him was to my uncle, *an old Don*. Think of it! A foolish girl makes a goose of a great statesman.

"We are all much occupied with a grand theatrical enterprise: the practising of a Spanish comedy by Sir Arthur Greene, in which Mr. Canning takes great diversion. I do not wonder that women, and the men too, love him so well, for he is so eager, so true, so gay—as gay as you—just as merry as if there were no politicks and no rivals in the world. He acts the hero's part with such grandeur that we all forget our speeches, and stop, amazed, to clap. But he is so very full of what Mamma would call *de belles ruses* that it is very hard for us to please him in our roles. You must know that in my part of the Countess Minevera, the daughter of Prince Ponta, I am to conceal myself behind a screen until the awful moment that my beloved Father summons assistance in the attack of Rodrigo the assassin, and I then rush forward to receive in my arms the fainting form of the Princess my Mother. Now Mr. Canning is never content that this screen shall be in the same place two days running. No sooner are we accustomed to a convenient position than he declares it will be better this way, or that it will be more mysterious if placed in a corner. At last—yesterday—Sir Arthur began to swear to himself, and there

was a choir of 'Oh! Mr. Canning,' but Cousin Molly stepped up to him and, curtsying like a Betty, said, 'Mr. Canning, Sir, there is no end to your splendid stratagems and fantasies. But we are plain people and would like to play the Comedy as it is written. Here is Sir Arthur raving, and not one of his beautiful love-locks will be left by the time that our friends assemble to see us perform. I verily believe, Sir, that if we were all on the way to Heaven, you would not be content to go by any visible path but an invisible one, very difficult and perplexing. And when we got to Heaven's Gate you would certainly not heed the voice of St. Peter calling to us to enter, but would cry, "See, there is a better way than the old gate that every one uses—see, a little hole in the shining wall. Friends, we will creep through."'

"If you could have heard her say it, you would have loved her roguery, Con. How we laughed! Old Mrs. Cowley shook her fat sides terribly. And Mr. Canning does not mind at all that we all dub him 'St. Peter' now. 'Tis all vastly amusing and I am merry except when I think of you—that perhaps we two have done very wrong. And yet I know that you would not mislead me and know everything, being a man and a great scholar. You must be a great scholar like Mr. Canning.

"I grope every minute for your ring, and know that at least this is real, and then I am less alone and afraid. I am to stay here about eight weeks, and then Cousin Molly finds some escort for me (another Mrs. Featherbed, perhaps!), and I suppose that I shall go to Court this winter. Cousin Molly says I must, and if her stepship continues to dye her hair—But this is unkind scandal, of which I am ashamed, seeing how rich I am to be so loved.

"Your most faithfull—WIFE.

"P.S.—There, it is written, and hurriedly sealed up for fear—for fear!"

CHAPTER XII

THE FOGRAM ENLIGHTENS JUNE

THE morning after the theatrical festivities for which so much pleasant preparation was made, June, restless and unable to sleep, dressed and slipped down into the gardens while the Castle still slumbered. The dew of the morning, which but a month ago would have filled her with delight, lay upon the lawns and the mellowing trees. But the magic of the morning

was there no longer. The dew itself only served to remind her of that hasty loving in the Heughside woods. She was all misgiving and regret. She could not escape from that compromising signature, "Wife"; and again she quarrelled with herself for her doubts, for what could it avail to regret one inch of the way she had trod? She was herself still, but different. Was it always so with love? A vision of Curragh flashed upon her—Curragh with loose neckcloth and head lolling on one side, snoring after dinner, while his wife looked coldly past him, ignoring his presence. It was at such a moment as this that Sir Arthur had whispered in June's hearing to Miss Sterne, "If only Mr. Gilray were here to portray our host! We have missed a masterpiece, my dear madam."

Such a vision led to thoughts. June wondered in her own puzzled girl's way whether her cousin's fair head could bear to rest on the shoulder of this stertorous piece of humanity, her spouse, through the long autumn night. From childish wonder she passed to a self-conscious shame, with thoughts that no maid can put into words. Doubts came about her once more in a strange dark cloud, for it seemed to her in that moment that Curragh stood as the type of all men. She understood suddenly the strange half apology in Molly's first speech of greeting.

Curragh had been a slender lad once. His portrait, in a cornet's uniform, was hanging in the picture-gallery. June was overcome by a grotesque desire to search in it a likeness to the original.

The house was still so silent, save for the flitting of a servant here and there, that she was astounded to hear a sound of light hammering as she entered the gallery. It was irritating, and her annoyance was not decreased by the sight of Mr. Heseltine, who, she assured herself, was the last person in the world whom she wished to see in her new, strange mood.

Mr. Heseltine was seated with his back to her on the low window-seat. He tapped the blade of a curious weapon with a light hammer, and the noise drowned the girl's approach. The sun shone full on his dark hair and his spare nervous figure. His hands, supple and sensitive, slipped critically along the blade, and then he took some powder and a silk kerchief, and began to polish the steel till it shone white. Then he walked over to the velvet rack, and, replacing this weapon, took down another, shorter and very pointed, with a jewelled handle. The blade of this was very rusty, and he handled it lovingly. It was when he turned to resume his

seat that he saw June. His earnest expression, so new to her, gave place to the old ironical air.

There was no seat except the window, and June crouched into it shyly. Mr. Heseltine fetched a tabouret, on which he steadied one foot, and laid the stiletto across his knee, polishing it as he talked.

"I thought no one but myself was awake," said June coldly.

"Had I drunk all the toasts pledged me by the excellent brothers of our host, I should be slumbering like them. But you? Why does Minevera waste her beauty sleep?"

"Oh! I came to be amused with the pictures."

She rose shyly, and wandered down the gallery. She could not have explained why it gave her such pleasure when presently he rose, and replaced the dagger and followed her.

"The rust of these swords can wait," he said. "I am free to tell you all the daring tales I know of your proud ancestors."

"Must I be proud of them?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That lies with yourself. If you are a Christian, and merciful, you will acknowledge them. If you are worldly, you will be glad to cry them on the housetops."

"I never knew that they were notable," she answered, piqued at his insinuation. "Tell me, are all these on my mother's side?"

"Yes, mostly. Here, for example, is a gallant fellow who was hacked to pieces at Sedgemoor. He was on the wrong side for his fortunes. Here is another stout fellow, but more recent. He is great-uncle of your mother, and also of Lady Curragh. Do you see that he is painted in riding dress? That I always surmise to have been a piece of delicious vanity, for the family correspondence has, unfortunately, let slip that he was so heavy that there was no horse big enough to stand such a burden for any space of time. Rumour also nastily hints that he was timid, yet his horsemanship has come down to posterity as his chief talent."

"Oh! tell me the story."

June's eyes were gay. "Now he is forgetting to be a dull, political old fogram," she said to herself.

"It was thus. It happened that, in a town riot, this doughty gentleman, as sheriff in charge, was forced to call out his men. They set him hurriedly on a large drayhorse, and one of the troop walked at its head. As he went thus to face the mob, Sir John was doubtless in terror of his life in two senses, for the Scottish-Irish of the north, when once roused, hew

about them like blind men stung by hornets. Horsemen and pikes came suddenly upon a barrier in the street overlooking the town square, which could only be directly reached by a flight of stone steps, and at the summit of these his worship read the Riot Act. He gabbled it out, probably shaking like an aspen, and was just coming to the 'God save the King' at the close, when his gigantic steed began to prance, and, taking fright at the uproarious mob below, broke from the groom who led it, and plunged full tilt down the steps. The fellow screamed to his master to sit back, and Sir John obeyed in sheer desperation. The crowd, breathless at such a devil-dare feat, backed away from the great hoofs, and the animal plunged on, cutting a way for itself. On came Sir John's pikes, helter-skelter after him, more in excitement than hostility. The first ranks of the rioters fell over the second, and the fourth and fifth began to fight each other, and when rogues begin to fight among themselves, the redcoats can make easy work of an uproar. As for the steed, it lumbered back to the carrier's stable in which it lived, and there the noble rider crawled off into the straw, praising heaven for his escape. Yet to look at him in this brave portrait, you would think him a very prince of the *manège*, would you not?"

"You are vastly entertaining. How have you learnt all these things?"

"I have a fondness for old papers and pictures. Your cousin some time ago asked me to make out as coherent a family history as I could, and therefore you find me here. It is a pity you cannot see the fine stained glass that used to be here. The Trowles, in one of their mad fits, made targets of the most beautiful of these armorial windows. Only two remain intact. That portrait in glass is the oldest of all. She was one of the family beauties. The children in that ancient daub opposite are hers."

"How curious! She wears a crown on her head like a Queen's crown, and there is no ring on her finger. Perhaps it was not modish to wear rings then?"

"Her spouse was one of the Edwards."

"Then she was Queen? Ah! how that would rejoice my stepmother."

"Alas! this poor lady never was Queen."

"She died——?"

"She died forsaken; but there is Royal blood for her legacy. It was all the restitution the King could make."

"You mean——?"

"That Royal devotion considered that it had done enough in giving her eldest son a title and a portion of the tithes of some crown land, without the unnecessary additional expense of a marriage license."

June, first red, then white, stared at the meek glass portrait in its stiff crown and its fanciful bodice.

"Tell me again," she said almost below her breath. "She was my mother's ancestress?"

"That is so."

"How dare they keep her portrait here? She was bad and foolish."

"History, in the family annals, has written nothing but good of her. Her sons fought for their country, her daughter was pure and pious. She loved the King well; she suffered much—Heavens! what are you doing, Miss Cherier?"—for June had drawn the stiletto out of its sheath with an angry movement.

"I should like to play at targets like the Trowles," she said. "I should like to drive this sharp point through that silly diadem of hers."

She laughed, half in play, half in earnest, and held the weapon behind her back.

"Take care. You had better give it to me. Ah! I feared you did not guess how well I had sharpened it."

She dropped the thing and winced. The point had pricked her badly. Mr. Heseltine was tearing his handkerchief into strips.

"Hold your hand steady," he said.

"Thank heaven, there goes the wrong blood," said June, feeling like a child that has been scolded. "Perhaps that is why the sons of the poor sham Queen went into battle so often. Mr. Heseltine, why do you men love fighting so much?"

"Absolve me. I have never even wished to gouge out the eyes of an ancestress."

June hung her head.

"I was very foolish. Your story told me of things which made me ashamed."

"Keep your finger steady," he answered, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"What am I saying?" she faltered. "My stepmother says I have no manners and no propriety, and so, Mr. Heseltine, as I have no character to lose and no experience, there is nothing to do but to ask you to forgive my stupidity."

Mr. Heseltine looked suddenly up to her face, and at her genuine distress he was deeply touched. He smiled reassurance with the eyes of a friend.

"Why does youth always treat inexperience as one of the seven deadly sins? And how young you are! As for your anger, it was a fine thing to see. But keep your weapons always sheathed, or you will suffer more than you need—and you will suffer enough as it is, it seems."

"You know nothing of me," said June, feeling that his keen eyes pierced even to the ring under her bodice.

"Nothing but what you tell me yourself." Then he laughed almost slyly. "I must really ask your pardon for talking to you like a dominie. As Mr. Brougham would say, 'The schoolmaster is abroad'—nay, he stalks abroad. Behold him!"—he made her a sweeping reverence. "But you shall not see him again. It was the tragedy in your face that gave the jog to my moralising. Oh! I know you think that I quiz and moralise. Now, after what I have told you, you will think I might have spared you some sorrowful knowledge. Neither I nor others can do that; but I blame myself for letting you think that all men and women hold honour cheaply. It is not so. The times in which we live are slowly bettering. England has her yeoman gentlemen, rough but honest, and in Ireland, though we are poor as rats, we have still kept our palates clean enough to sicken at German grossness. I ask your forgiveness a hundred times for that word, but there is no other to express the nature of some of our Court practices, both past and present. You will hear of these things, perhaps. I trust they may not come close to you. The full knowledge of life—the need of which is, to my thinking, the shaking off of everything that is unnecessary to the courageous soul—is the utmost achievement of a woman as well as of a man, and needs the whole strength of mind and body. Therefore I ask you to spare yourself anger and sorrow that cannot serve you, and to be generous in seeing and hearing what you must see and hear, casting aside, as you must do of your own intuition, the unseemly, which is the useless, and remembering only the humanity of us all."

June listened, shy, puzzled, strangely glad to find that a conspirator and a fogram spoke so simply and from his heart to her, a girl.

"I thank you," she said, with a quaintly formal air, and put out her hand.

He held it for a moment smiling, and spoke on.

"Forget that I who speak am so much of a stranger to you, forget also that I am a man. I am, compared to you, an ancient, a fogram,"—June coloured at his own application of her epithet—"a fellow who has been buffeted by opinions and

fortune, and has nothing to be proud of but that of the fact that he has never raised his hand against any fellow-being."

"Yet you sharpened those blades just now as if you were a fighting man."

"That is because I abhor to see rust lying on a fine piece of craftsmanship. You would not see me give a thought to the polishing of Geoffrey's bludgeon."

"Poor Geoffrey!"

"Give your pity to me, pray, for Geoffrey has offered to knock me down. I said I would think it over and give him an answer in writing."

"And what happened?"

"He grumbled that I was a poor-livered sportsman, and then, because Denis joined in the growls, the other vowed I was a long-headed fool, and had paid a great compliment to his wrestling, offered to ruin me at loo, and walked me off to the stables with his great arm round my neck."

June laughed heartily at the picture. Mr. Heseltine's dry humour had put the old distance between them. She felt, not without relief, that they were once more strangers who could talk of trivial things. He had helped her to some philosophy, and his sudden frankness and interest thrilled her with a feeling that was not in her old catalogue of emotions. She translated it as gratitude.

CHAPTER XIII

A STORY OF FEALTY AND DISASTER

"AND so you will not worship with us, Master Heretic," called Miss O'Gallon to Mr. Heseltine, as the ladies on the lawn gathered for church. The bell of the chapel in the park was yapping its summons to the flock to which the Rev. Cornelius Troomer (the same for whom his sister had reserved her sugar-plums) played pastor.

Mr. Heseltine shook his head. He had a book in his hand, and came forward to hold open a gate for the company.

"I will petition for you," said Sir Arthur Greene, who carried Miss Sterne's prayer book and posy.

"Why does he not come?" asked June, as the party moved away.

"Because he is a Catholic," answered Mr. Canning.

"No, I do not believe it, in spite of his political banner

and his emancipation enthusiasm. Such a faith is too circumscribed for Stephen Heseltine," said the hostess.

"But one must surely be one thing or another," interposed a sweet voice.

"Ah! Joan," cried Mr. Canning. "If men and women and things could for ever be divided into two equal portions, how clean cut would be the path of us all."

"There is nothing to be done with such fellows," prattled Sir Arthur. "They read revolutionist pamphlets and are at heart starched monarchists. They dig on the land one minute, abhorring books, and the next they will spin you brain-splitting theories about the Deity. They tilt at war, and are themselves firebrands."

"No, no." George Canning took up the absentee's cause warmly. "A firebrand he is not. Had Ireland more like him, loving peace and hating violence, we should have purer policy for her to-morrow."

"There would be no dipping of the hand in the bag, at least," sighed Lady Curragh.

"It is too true," began Mr. Canning eagerly. Then he checked himself, to June's bitter disappointment, and fell to rallying Miss O'Gallon on her red tippet and her fear of Curragh's gentle cows, which flattered the artless Flora beyond expression.

The chapel was warm and airless, and June fidgeted. Some ferocious ruby glass above her caught her eye continually. She gazed through it into a fiery world beyond.

"In the day when the heavens shall become scarlet as hyssop," bellowed Mr. Troomer.

Through the ruby pane that vision seemed already realised. June awoke with a start from her dream, and saw with amusement that the rays from the ruby and green panes caught the chaste profile of the "bella Angiolini." But though the Reverend Corney could bellow like a bull, his disposition was as gentle as that of his little old sister, and his voice died away into a pastoral murmur when he passed on to the winnowing of souls, which he likened to the ingathering and storing of the new green tea, that numbered no withered leaf nor any imperfect one, while the single riches of every chosen shoot was needful to the perfect harvest. This he said not without a touch of pride in his own science, while he beamed through his glasses upon my lady of the Castle, whose last gift to him had been a packet of the rare luxury.

The audience rose to its feet at last, and June, who had no

hymn book, shared one with Mr. Canning. She made a show of participation, while she watched him sideways from under her bonnet, as he lifted up his fine face and sang every word in a baritone that was not without beauty of quality. She felt that a great man who could sing a hymn from the same book as a country girl must be one of those heroes of that world in which she would play a part in time to come.

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The English mails had just arrived when the party returned to the house. The man was still watering his horse and re-strapping his bags as June, hungry for news from Conway, slipped through the servants' quarters by a short cut to the table in the hall, on which she knew that letters were laid. The pile contained none for her, and she went to her own room once more to combat the distrust that tormented her at every turn.

This secret was not hers only, but also his; but to have spoken of it to the first comer would now have taken from her a load that pressed like iron. To have told it to Molly Curragh would, indeed, have been the most perfect relief of all. But a strange secretiveness, peculiar, under certain conditions, to the most impulsive and hot-blooded of creatures, had seized the girl, who was all the while little conscious of her fierce resolution. Too unskilled to explain herself to herself, she remained mutely obstinate, biding the outcome, doggedly hugging a summer romance which, so the primitive intensity of her emotions led her to believe, contained the beginning and the end of a whole life. She lived over those radiant hours in the woods, and whispered over Conway's words to her, but dared not think over her answers, so deadly secret did it all seem in the looking back. The autumn wind, sweeping over the bare stone-strewn hills, shook the trees under her window, and a terror of reality came over her. She hated the wind for its demoniacal roughness. She put out her hand to reach the sash, struggling with the twisted catch. When she turned she almost started to see Lady Curragh standing a few paces away. She came forward with her head a little bent, and, keeping her eyes averted, took the girl's hand in both her own, and spoke in her usual level tone, but with a strange trembling of the lips.

"I have had a letter," she began.

Upon that her calm wavered. She almost dragged June back to the window and took her face between her hands.

"Are you brave?" she said, with her eyes full of tears.



"Conway!" thought June. Her heart stood still in a sick horror.

"I think you are brave, with the bravery of a Gulliamy and Cherier together."

She released the girl and drew her to a seat.

"I have pinched your face, child, and left the marks of my fingers on your strange matt cheeks. I wonder why they called you June—you who are to be overswept by a heavy storm? You think I am raving. I am not, but—There, do not grow any whiter. No one is dead, thank God, or even ill. Come here, and I will tell you a story."

She slipped her arm about the girl.

"Once there was an Englishman, the truest of gentlemen and the best of Whigs—a Whig from conviction, remember, and not from truckling to high personages—and he owned great wealth. That wealth he first amassed by sheer sweat and then maintained by hard toil and wise government of his resources, and he did not use that wealth for selfish ends. All that he could fairly spare was given to the party for which he was proud to fight, and he dealt with his estates and the men under him as a just master. You have heard some talk here of the emancipation, the measure which is to ensure the rights of free men for those who are not of the Anglican communion. The man of whom I speak is no Catholic, but a rigid and uncompromising Lutheran, yet he is a man of fine temper, and it is to the securing of these liberties and equalities that much of his substance has gone. Just now I told you that he never fawned upon high personages for the sake of reward. I see you do not follow me. There is one among these who is closely concerned in the matter. The gentleman who is heir to the throne, June, has extravagant tastes. You have heard sufficient to know that he throws in his fortune with the Whigs. The old Queen hates them, therefore it gives him a weapon against her. The first Prince of this country is perpetually in debt, and has squeezed his mother for money till he can squeeze no longer. Five years ago he was in sore need of a large sum. In an evil hour the man of whom I spoke first, our good Whig, was persuaded by some one, I know not who, to lend the Prince a large sum. It was suggested that to put the lord of Carlton House under a personal obligation of so important a nature would ensure his support finally for the emancipation scheme. He seemed on the verge of it a hundred times, and the party saw at last the end of their long struggle. And James Cherier——"

June gave a little start of surprise.

"Ah! I have let my parable slip. It is so—it is your father who has fought so well and who has befriended the Prince, but it was not he who used his money as a handle over the Prince's suffrage. He is no traducer of convictions, thank God—no Liverpool with balance in one hand and a purse in the other. He did what he did from a sturdy loyalty to the head of the party; but the bonds that your father received"—she laid her hand earnestly upon June's arm, and her lips curled—"were not worth the ink of the poor lawyer's scrivener that penned them. They are worse than unreal, and James Cherier knew it soon after he accepted them. You know that he has been buying a great deal of land lately towards Morpeth?"

"Yes, where his new mines are."

"My child, the new mines are as dead as the bonds. They are barren."

"Then my father is——"

Her cousin could scarcely stammer the word through tears.

"James Cherier has his honour as a gentleman, and some residue of his fortune is left to pay immediate debts, but the estate must go. Presently we will talk over it. And you must be very brave, as I told you. You shall hear his letter."

June listened and understood, but did not realise, and was utterly abashed at her own lack of demonstration.

"Tell me now," she said briefly, and stood with wide staring eyes and a slight frown. If Juniper Hall must go she would not return there. To London. How near was London to Oxford?

* * * * *

All this was no easier to understand at dusk than it had been at noon. The world went its way. There once more was Sir Arthur and the simpering Miss Sterne, and here Mr. Canning, Mr. Heseltine, and the rest, all exchanging the petty merchandise of everyday discussion. It was true that the latter group was awkwardly silent as June entered the room, and, vaguely annoyed with herself for showing no traces of emotion, she sheltered herself by plunging into talk with Miss O'Gallon, who was satisfactorily unconscious. Her sugary compassion would indeed have been unbearable.

Presently Mr. Canning strolled over to them.

"Here," he said gaily, "is your album. You asked me to write in it yesterday, and since Sir Arthur was in one of his freakish moods, he promised that his sketch for you should match my doggerel. So you must please forgive a dull old

politician, who gets parlous little amusement, for rhyming rubbish once in a way. Here's a fellow who will write you something better," he added, touching Heseltine on the arm.

"Unless you wish for mordant sarcasms at the expense of the majority, and sentiments that will burn your page," interposed the baronet, "I should advise you to keep your book out of his hands, Miss Cherier, or at least let me preserve unblemished the page on which Mr. Canning's genius and mine is immortalised, ere you give the rest into the hands of the incendiary."

"When the time comes for the burning of books," answered the Irishman, as June put the volume into his hands, "I think, Sir Arthur, you may safely leave that to their owners."

But what June found in the book when she went to look for it in the picture-gallery next day was neither sarcasm nor epigram, but merely this ordinary fragment:—

"I have been watching a butterfly on this diamond pane, and it seems very like you. It is small, and its wings are as blue as the Irish mountains, which are never the same blue for more than two seconds. It sees very clearly all the world in front of it, and wishes to reach it at once. You know that this winged creature typifies the soul, Pysche. This one struggles, as you will struggle. It loses some of its lustre, which is a pity. I have placed open a square in the lattice above, and still it goes on beating its slight body against the cold glass. Once it saw a reflection of itself and was quiet; I could almost imagine it revelling in its own vision. But it has begun to flutter again. That is very obstinate, for it will not have help. A sturdy bumble was in the same plight just now, but I gave it a finger and it crawled amiably along and tumbled contentedly out into the flowers. I know, of course, that that bee is intoxicated. In its own fairy realm it surely plays as magnificent a table-part as the First Gentleman of England. Ah! Psyche, Psyche, whatever your sins may be, they will not be the sins of the body. If——"

The paragraph was broken off, and the pen had evidently been hurriedly put down, for it came away now from the paper with a crackle.

June read the words in a pleasant confusion. Her later thoughts told her that this man, a stranger after all, had presumed in speaking to her of her sins. But then it was all you could expect of a fogram with a patch of grey hair over his left brow! She was half inclined to tear the page out; and yet the legend pleased as much as it piqued her. She would revenge

herself by making no comment till the eve of departure, and then she could thank him for this unsolicited homily.

Fate, however, was to leave no space for comment, for, long ere June found her book that morning, Mr. Heseltine, to whom a sudden summons had come, had ridden away, breakfastless, to take his share of the risk of broken heads in a township where starvation and idleness had made men into beasts and women into maniacs. The Trowles, ready for anything in which they could give play to their windmills of limbs, pelted after him. They clattered back just before dark—dusty, thirsty, garrulous.

"You there, my Lady Paleface," shouted Denis to June; "tell Molly we're back and shall eat the place bare if we are not turned into the pantry at once."

She ran down the steps and stopped in disappointment, for her fogram was not with them.

"Oh! are you hurt?" she cried, "there is blood on your faces."

Both roared.

"Scratches, Paleface."

"Where is Mr. Heseltine?"

"In the thick of it still, facing a lot of half-mad swine, and with nothing but a cane in his hand."

"And you could leave him?" she flashed scornfully.

"They are his own people, silly," growled Denis, "and he knows best how to keep them quiet. Talk about fight! I believe he could do more with that cane than Geoff with all his crack pistolry."

"Aren't you glad now he didn't take your offer to knock him down on Sunday?" sneered Geoffrey, who had got hold of a beer-jug.

"Knocking down is a very different thing, sir. It's weight against weight. But when a man as cool as ice and quick as light looks at you with the devil in his eyes, and a smart cane in his hand, it's time to stop whistling."

"It's not the blows he strikes, though. He never touched man or woman once, though I saw one spalpeen go at him hammer and tongs. Denis, if I were to glare at you like this"—he made a gruesome face—"would you lave hitting me, Denis, dear?"

"That's hapes," said Denis, from the bottom of his tankard.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE IN GOLDEN SQUARE

NOT even the succession of incidents which her southern journey unrolled could bring the girl out of her dream-world. She was in a condition of the highest excitement, fighting to realise her own attitude, not only towards the new circumstances in which she was thrown, but towards that world of men and things at which she had as yet barely glimpsed. It seemed a rich world, and she coveted it greedily. It seemed true and fit that she should move at the right hand of those who thought independently, and acted as units, persons of power and vital force, weapons in the hands of a people. She gazed out of the windows of the post-chaise in dead silence. Mrs. Hester, who, accompanied by the secretary, met her at Holyhead, had received her with tears and many an "Oh, my dear young lady, God help us!" but June's curt responses, and her subsequent silence, with what Mrs. Hester called a new stand-offishness, had dried up the good woman's sobs with rapidity.

To the secretary's formal speech of condolence, June merely asked if her father was well, and how long it would take to post to London. She would not hear of stopping an hour longer on the route than was absolutely necessary, and the night they halted at Coventry she could not rest, but was up betimes and walking feverishly through the streets, to the profound scandal of the waiting-woman.

The hood of the chaise was put down as the day lengthened and grew warmer. The Black Country was soon behind them. Through Birmingham they clattered, and through the land of furnaces, and reached better roads, and fuller, richer woods. June sat on the right, dreaming, dreaming, and wondering where was Oxford. Once they passed over a heath crossed by many roads, and at one finger-post she came out of her dream for a moment, and her eyes glowed purple. Then she let the veil down over them.

"Where does that lead?" she said, pointing to the road.

"To Oxford," said the secretary, who had seen the momentary flash in her eyes with disgust, and knew that she had seen the post as clearly as he. "If we had thought of it, now, and if you, June, had not been in such a desperate hurry to see the lights of London, we might have stopped to look up

our young friend Conway there. It is only three miles by road, and only one and a half as an arrow flies, June."

He spoke with irritating deliberation, and his continual use of her name in the manner of a respectful caress to a child, with his intimate air, kept June continually raging. He was seated next to her. It was impossible to avoid this arrangement. Now and again he would lean over to her side, pointing out a country landmark, or a well-known ford. Once his knee pressed hers, and she shivered with resentment. He apologised in the grandest fashion for incommoding her, but his eyes, as she read them, said, "You know you can say nothing. I am not self-appointed your protector. I have kept my distance to all intents and purposes. I ask nothing from you now. I have not forgotten the thing of which you reminded me; but there may be a day when your father releases me—when fate alters your position and mine. What then?"

She clenched her fist and almost turned her back upon him, that she might dream once more of meetings and partings with Conway at Juniper Hall, of the things she had seen and heard on the bowling-green at Castle Curragh, of her Cousin Molly's gentle radiance and parting sorrow, of the tender sympathy of Joan Canning, who had taken the girl to her heart and cried over the bankruptcy of her old friend, of the tacit sympathy of Joan's husband, who had sought to lure the girl into gay talks and games for the remainder of her stay, and of the keen, swift looks of Mr. Heseltine, who spoke but once to her as he put a thick letter for her father into her hands.

"What I think, is there," pointing to the sealed envelope; "what I feel, I cannot tell, even to John Cherier's daughter, who, if she is his real flesh and blood, will do as he has done—act and not dream. What I shall do, is"—he bowed his head simply—"in the hands of God. You seem surprised to hear me speak such a name. We Catholics, even those of us who do not trouble to eat fish on this day or that, have at least belief enough to guide us. It is sufficient to keep us humble. I beg your pardon for this self-defence and this opinion. If our campaign here ends soon, I shall come to London and see your father, I trust, and what sums I can rescue from misuse and frittering when Mr. Grattan has made his plans, I will earnestly seek to restore to your house."

The air made June drowsy, the strain on her nerves, the constant passing of new objects wearied her out. She fell asleep, only conscious that Mrs. Hester, murmuring "My poor lamb," had flung a cloak over her. The noise of vehicles

and Mrs. Hester's voice woke her up again, crying, "Miss June, Miss June, we're only ten minutes from Golden Square. Let me put your bonnet straight, and look and see the beautiful ladies and sparks walking, and the carriages driving back from the Wells. That's the Queensberry liveries, mulberry and silver. Look, my dear."

CHAPTER XV

THE GHOSTS OF FESTIVITY

A FAINT, damp steam rose from the ground, and the trees in Golden Square seemed surprisingly bare to June, who had feasted her eyes on the gold and copper of Irish woods. She could scarcely see trees; but there was a slight breeze, and she could hear the branches waving. It was dark, and in that grey light one house looked more formal than the next. At the corner of the Square, there was one which had a larger doorway and finer link-rests than the others, and it was before this that they stopped. A ragged man ran up, carrying a pole with a rough glaring lamp attached to it, and pulled the door-bell, while Mr. Frewin ordered him to stand away from the carriage door; by the light June saw the rich scrolls of the ironwork, and the empty lamp-holder over the door, and row upon row of blind, shuttered windows in a house of deep-toned brick. Half asleep, she stepped out, cramped and dazed. It seemed a long time before any one came; it was no northern welcome, this grey quiet, and these bare damp paving-stones, in the raw October evening, with not a dog's bark or a man's whistle anywhere. At last a woman opened the door, holding a candle high over her frowsy head.

"It's you?" she said briefly, and she called to a boy behind to come and fetch the baggage.

"Is her ladyship arrived?" asked Mr. Frewin.

"Mr. Cherier's wife, do you mean?" said the woman. "Lord! yes; came yesterday, and it's my lady this and my lady that, and my lady wishes apples fetched from the moon, and a French supper, dished up in a twinkling, with only one pair of hands to do it all. Oh! yes, my lady's here right enough, and so are her trunks. My back aches with unpacking them."

"Be quiet, woman," said Mrs. Hester, "and show Miss Cherier and this gentleman to the drawing-room."

"Drawing-room? The dealers have got to go there

to-morrow, and nice and bare they'll leave it. The study is where my lady has to sit."

Past shrouded pictures and marble, past settees and chairs of dusty gilt, half-wrapped in paper, she led the way. Every detail of it June remembered, even to the slouching of the woman's shoes along the stone floor set in large polished squares of black and white stone. She paused before a door of the room at the back of the house, and flung it open awkwardly. Lady Mildred rose from the couch with a cry of pathos, and moved weakly forward as if to fall into June's arms, who, saying dryly, "How do you do, mamma? do not get up, you are tired," walked straight across to the window, where the Squire sat with his back to the door.

"Father," she said, "father, I am here. You sent for me, you know."

She stood waiting patiently, accustomed to his deliberate ways.

"Yes, yes," he said, kissing her absently. "Yes, you have never seen London, my dear; you will like London, will you not? Heughside——" He took her hand as if the words stuck, and held it, tightening and relaxing his grasp perpetually. "But London is a fine place, you know, a grand place, a grand——"

"Not much good to us—its grandeur—James," wailed her ladyship. "You were always prating to me of the Spartan life and the thrifty life, and now we have got to live it, it does not seem to make you very happy. He sits there"—she appealed to June and Mr. Frewin—"all day, and not one word of comfort do I have, and women who are delicate suffer cruelly, to say nothing of the shame in a failure like this."

"Failure? Shame?" said the Squire, who was alert now. "They are your own words—I have not used them. Since you have attempted nothing, it cannot be you that have failed; and as for the shame, if it pleases you to clothe yourself with it as a garment, you are welcome. I am sure you never had a cheaper one, Mildred; but remember that it is of your own cutting and fashion."

He laughed bitterly, and rose, walking into the room.

"Well, how do you do?" he said to the secretary. "After supper we will do business—no, not after supper; we will get up early—one can rise as early in London as in Northumberland, Mr. Frewin."

Mrs. Hester waited at the meal, and darted furious glances at the caretaker's boy, who lumbered about with dishes. She acted the part of a tragedy queen with such effect that June,

tired and perplexed as she was, nearly choked with suppressed laughter.

"Will you never be serious?" snapped Lady Mildred, under her breath, and then began to cry softly, while the secretary, with what he meant to be a glance of comic understanding, hunted for her handkerchief under the table.

To be frank, it seemed to the girl that the uppermost sensation in her mind was that of dulness. She had expected anguish, startling episode, crisis crowding on crisis. Once, long ago, in a book of tales belonging to her stepmother, June had come upon a sensational narrative of ruin, entitled, "The Wreck of Captain Rackster, or Love Hurl'd Headlong;" but that was a magnificent fiasco, with a jewelled pistol for the final act, and a *mise en scène* of tropical and languorous richness, a bankruptcy in a palace, and a suicide in its rose-garden. But here there was no palace in which to shed tears of luxury, nor any rose-garden to temper tragedy, and the faint, moist odour she had noticed on the previous evening seemed yet to linger.

When the morning came, she had intended to slip out into the streets alone, but when she peeped out of the window she saw a crowd of ill-dressed men waiting to come in, and she retreated and ran up the white, bare stairs, to find herself in the large withdrawing-room. Lady Mildred was there, seated on a yellow sofa, the only piece that was not swathed in calico. The silk curtains were still hanging, and the secretary opened the window to give the room freshness. Her ladyship ran to the balcony as a tall, finely dressed woman stepped out of the opposite house, attended by a negro page.

"Do you see her?" she said triumphantly to the secretary. "The brazen face! There was a rout there last night; but I think she must have danced a reel with her butler—poor creature!—for there was but one footman at the door, and a solitary curricule, and we know whose *that* was!"

She laughed a little melodious laugh, quite in her old way.

"The excellent countess opposite is a highly respectable member of society," drawled Mr. Frewin, "and moves in the most select circles—so select that only two or three dare seek an entry to her presence. And she goes to Court——"

"So does Mrs. Fitzherbert, my dear Edward——"

But the Squire called loudly from below, and his scribe hurried away.

"Ah, June," sighed Lady Mildred, "you will never see a ball in your father's house." She wiped away fresh tears. "Poor child, poor child! You should have made your entry

into society this very year. You would have looked so *distinguée* in white; and these rooms, when the candles are lit, are so becoming to a pale woman, *au teint clair*. You would have made a real hit, my dear, in these days when people paint themselves like carnations. You make quite a picture there with that statue of the nereid behind you. Oh, dear *ciel*, to think that that nereid must go! Oh! the brutes"—she shook her fist out of the window at the dealers. "There they are, like sharks, the plebeians. Why, that bit of the cornice is broken. How tiresome; I really must get it mended. Ah! I forgot."

Fresh tears, fresh sighs and groans, June standing all the while silent and stolid and fierce—fierce with a want of control she could not understand, fierce at the strange confusion in her fate, fierce at the thought, not only of her helplessness, but of her sheer nonentity. Who was she?—and what? A child still, a mere girl whose fortunes were bound up with those of this woman, and of a father who seemed miles distant from her. And beyond this there was nothing. Nothing? She clung to the thought of Conway in that moment as she had never clung to it before. He came before her in all this squalor once more in the guise of a young god of the woods and streams, with radiance on his brow and the staff of definite purpose and power in his hand. Then, again, her thoughts floated further. Could the young god wield great weapons? Could he hold men by the glow of his eye and the cool defiance of his carriage, and mould the world and direct great forces? What those forces were she could not define, but they were the guerdon of maturity. She wondered what Mr. Heseltine looked like when a boy; and then, a wave of contempt passing over her, she thought to herself, "I do not believe he ever was young, the fogram." For his homilies still tingled, and her caprice alternately condoned and condemned them. She lived always so much in this inner world of her own busy fancies that even now, as she followed Lady Mildred over the house and heard plaintive descriptions of the modish entertainments that its walls had seen, she scarcely noted the details.

"This frieze, you know, was modelled by Cellari; he decorated Carlton House at the same time. A most entertaining creature, my dear. It was my choice to have the panels of Helen and Paris here. Cellari was a vile flatterer, and said he had taken my profile for his Helen. In a certain light there is a likeness, June, you see—a very considerable likeness—and the arms are a copy; but this terrible affair has aged me

in a few weeks. Ah! June, Cellari said to me once, 'Madam, if there's one thing beautiful in life, it is your arm.' But all these rooms will go to some other woman now. I used to stand here by the doorway at our assemblies, June, wearing the diamond crown you have seen in my jewel-box, and generally a gown of white or pale rose—both colours look well in this room. And Patterson, the new *chausseur*, my dear, in Soho, made for me a vastly effective pair of shoes last winter, with a contrivance for raising me an inch and a half in height—you know it was always height that I lacked—and the effect was superb. I let no one into the secret, nor did Patterson, though I know Lady Oxford, and Lady Jersey, and Lady Conyngham all went to him privately to try and get it out of him, the old demi-reps. *Mon Dieu*, what is that?"

There was a sound as of broken glass, and the loud crack of a firearm at the back of the house.

"James, James, oh! he has shot himself."

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Frewin, who came running upstairs. "The Squire has merely shot the Marshal, that is all. He would not have him sold with the rest of the horses. The bidder annoyed him, and he chose this way of settling the matter."

"Oh! James, James," cried Lady Mildred, over the balustrade, "how wicked of you to spoil good horse-flesh like that, and the most valuable of the hunters, too!"

"Silence, woman," said the Squire, wiping his pistols and shutting himself into his room again.

There were tears in the girl's eyes at last, and she could not hide them. Her stepmother precipitated herself on June's shoulder.

"Oh, June, June, you must help us all; you see how little your father cares to save anything from the wreck. You must marry—make a match worthy of us all—a brilliant marriage. And why not, why not? Ah! if only you let me have my way with you, instead of following your own stubborn ways, regardless of all wisdom! Ah! yes, wealth you must have. Help us, June. Think of your father. Your fortunes might raise his; you could bring him back to power, to Parliamentary influence, to the favour of the Regent. Oh, June, it is in your power now."

June, with her wedding-ring hanging about her neck, answered nothing, but grew chill and sick; whilst the woman of fashion clung feebly to her impassive hand.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH JUNE'S EDUCATION CONTINUES

How the weeks and the days wore on June scarcely knew. The house was left empty and bare, and she was glad when the door, crowned with its carved garlands of fruit, closed behind the Cheriers for ever, and a move was made into a lodging in Soho. Here she would sit all day, looking wearily out at the men and women that passed, wishing to touch them and speak to them. The air stifled her. A letter from Conway, full of extravagant expressions of grief, and entreaties that she would let him write to Mr. Cherier, she kept with her continually. She tried to answer it, and finally did so, borrowing the money to frank it from Mrs. Hester, and not daring to ask openly for fear of inquiries.

Lawyers and men of business came to and fro, and once a silken lady, a friend of Lady Mildred, visited her, and the two were closeted for hours, to the begetting of much dolour and lamentation. Much against her will, June, for some trifling reason, had to interrupt the interview. She was duly presented to the visitor and curtsied awkwardly.

"Ah!" said the visitor, staring through her eyeglass, "*mais charmante*—she will be brilliant. *Ma bien-aimée*, a post at Court! You must get her to Court; but mind you get her on the right side. No broken-down Germans, pray."

"Oh! the Brunswicker," said Lady Mildred, throwing up her eyes. "Surely, my dear Lady Cane, you do not credit me with so little worldly wisdom as that, let alone common decency."

"Who is the Brunswicker?" said June.

"There, you see how innocent she is!" cried Lady Mildred. "Dear, dear, what is the latest news? How is Signor 'Squallini' getting on?"

"Thriving like a cock," said the other. "I have just heard from Sir William Gell. You know he really is very naughty about poor Mrs. Thompson—that's the Princess of Wales, Miss Cherier. He has been down at Blackheath lately, and he has had a dosing of her, I can assure you. You know it is her latest fad to have picnics, and when the days are wet, she is like an infant, my dear, and will not be baulked in any of her plans. She will have the meal laid on the floor and every one must sit down and pretend to partake of a sylvan banquet. Sir William says that she does it to tease poor Lady Anne Hamilton, who has rheumatic knees and hates autumn picnics.

And the *menus*! The good lady-in-waiting thinks that eating raw onions is good for the complexion, and a dish of them is always laid by her, and the Princess has taken it into her head to ride, and goes out every morning with the Italian 'Squallini' in attendance, the poor music-master in terror of his life all the while, and abusing her below his breath. And the goings on! Sir William Gell was passing from the cardroom to his apartment late one night, and a sofa pillow fell at his feet. He looked up and saw a certain young lady scurrying away in a great fright, and next morning she was most demure and starched, and oh! my dear——" and here the lady fell a-whispering. June turned away in astonishment, half despising the gossip, half eager to know what women of fashion knew and discussed.

* * * * *

"She must go to Court."

The phrase had taken deep root in the girl's mind. Life for her, so far, had been sufficient in episode; but at this moment she had a craving for independent participation in things that were not mere episode. She re-opened her letter, and then wrote part of it again, making her plea for continued secrecy still stronger.

"'Tis not that I do not love you," she wrote, and paused, looking very hard, with her eyes very wide open, at the sky through the window of her Soho attic. "Is that true to myself?" she asked herself. "Yes, yes; I do love him, I think." And then she dipped her pen again to say, "But I beg with all my heart and soul that you will tell my father nothing, yet. What good can it do us? We cannot be together, for you must finish your study and choose your calling, and I am dowerless, you know. I should burden you. If you tell your guardian, there is a danger that he might be angry. Oh! Con, I do not know why, but I dread the scoldings, that the chatterings, that the loss of our secret would bring upon us. I have but one idea—to escape from it all and make the way clear for myself. But how? You will laugh at my fears. But I am a woman—I would not have all my heart laid bare. My words stumble. What can I do but pray you to shelter me now, by your love and in your thoughts, and shield me from the blame of others."

She wrote it earnestly, and with tears.

The secretary had assumed a new attitude towards her; one of easy and distant gallantry. Far from setting her at her ease, it made her self-conscious, but innately imitative and quick, she

had caught the tone of it, and schooled by the trifling of Miss Sterne and her admirers, answered his covert rallies with a brevity and nonchalance that surprised Lady Mildred.

"You are vastly improved, child," she would say. "I should like Lady Morgan to hear you. I reckon your tongue would wag the faster for all her quips and McDonnell's, and duchesses and vaporous heroines. Oh! child, if I could see you at Court. James, could not the politicians of whom you're so fond bring June into notice? Why, there's Miss Bell getting her £300 and her uniform in Germany with some old Grand Duchess, and all because of her elegant figure and a hand for the harp."

"I do not want my daughter to work for me."

Edward Frewin had noticed all this, and when the opportunity came, he said aside to June:

"Would you go to Court, if you had the chance to-morrow?"

"How do I know?"

"You could help your father."

"You heard him say that he did not wish me to work for him," she answered disdainfully.

"That is what he says, God help him. But do you know the real state of his affairs? Do you realise that within a month there is no place for him but the Continent, the place of debtors, and that there you may live in such misery and squalor as you and he have never imagined?"

"Within a month?"

"He himself does not know the extent of his ruin. He has made himself liable for the debts of others. I have kept back the details as long as I could."

He paused. June was deceived by his apparent delicacy and tremulous sympathy.

"If I went to Court, would it help him?" she asked quickly.

"It would relieve him, after the first wrench, to know that you were happy. And for you—to think of you in squalor is horrible."

June slipped listlessly into the chair against which she was leaning. A sudden abhorrence of greyness and poverty had overwhelmed her; and yet there was Conway for whom she waited. And then the idea of a brilliant life drew her to it again. Her chilled imagination and her latent vitality glowed afresh.

"Windsor and Carlton House would be more entertaining than the card-tables at Boulogne, presided over by broken-down beaux," said the secretary drily, while he watched her intently. June turned to him with a little laugh, half eager, like a child.

As the days went on his conferences with Mr. Cherier grew shorter, and he ceased coming altogether.

"Where is Edward Frewin?" asked his wife peevishly. "I haven't heard any news for days, and this vile old parlour is all dirt and dulness. I am positively dying for scandals, and I want my letters written. Where is he?"

Mr. Cherier turned away muttering something about rats and sinking ships.

"The wretch," she wailed.

But Mr. Frewin came that afternoon and offered to escort her and June to the Green Park. They hired a hackney coach, the secretary sitting bodkin, and drove to Piccadilly.

The walks were not full, parliamentary folk being all absent, though there were some elegant gentlemen and some ladies in the new Indian shawls, which diverted her ladyship hugely. But the strangest apparition was that of a spark in blue swallow tails and a country hat, with a stock of the most dandified pattern, surmounted by a complexion in which beef and beer and hard riding struggled for supremacy. He was walking with a couple of blooming misses, and his great foolish mouth was wreathed with the most fatuous smiles as he turned from one to the other.

"It's Jack Newbery," said the secretary.

"Lord! he has a mouth like a mole trap," said her ladyship.

"Yes, but his mother has a house at Windsor, and knows the young Princesses," said Mr. Frewin significantly.

So my lady dropped her gloves conveniently, the large foot of the country swain crushed them into dust, and in the shortest space of time Mr. Newbery was to all intents and purposes tied hand and foot to her ladyship's skirts.

"And how is the King?" she asked deferentially.

"As strange as ever," he babbled, "and repeats himself, they say, till you can't understand one from t'other. He used to come and see my mother and send all the maids a-heap by stumping in through the back door; but he doesn't do that now. His wife keeps him in bounds."

"Poor dear gentleman. But it really is necessary you know. June, is it not true—my daughter, Mr. Newbery—is it not a fact, my love, that Lord Castlereagh—she has been staying in Ireland where Lord Castlereagh was, Mr. Newbery—that Lord Castlereagh states that he heard His Majesty begin his address to the House last time he appeared as 'My Lords and Peacocks'?"

"If the ladies who were there dress anything like these,"

June pointed to the two blooming misses who had just re-passed on the other side of the avenue, "I do not think, mamma, that it is marvellous that the King should have called out 'Peacocks.'"

At which Mr. Newbery laughed so uncontrollably that June instantly recognised herself as a brilliant wit, and regretted that she had no better place in which to display it than obscurity in Soho. Regret amounted to irritation when an old admirer of her stepmother, who had just returned from the Indies, desired to escort them home. At the same moment Mr. Newbery invited the secretary to supper with him, and made his adieux to the ladies with a good-natured but clumsily expressed desire to pursue their acquaintance.

Her ladyship was half disposed to accept the escort offered, but some demon of pride prompted June to whisper, "No, no. Tell him we will drive," as she turned to give the secretary and his friends the most grandiloquent curtsey she could achieve.

They drove home in silence. June pondered upon the secretary and the gaiety that was possible to the most broken down of gentlemen, and wondered profoundly why women should take the catastrophes of life so sorely. Then a vision of her father, as she left him that afternoon sitting with drawn, anxious face at a table covered with papers, brought her pride to penitence and despair. And the words of Edward Frewin chased her through feverish dreams: "In a month—the place of debtors—Continental squalor—Windsor is more entertaining than the card-tables of Boulogne."

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. NEWBERY'S DESCENT, AND ITS POTENT OUTCOME

REBELLION is the chief luxury of the emotional mind, and so persons of generous feelings usually come to regard it as a prerogative; but your professed philosopher is quite as reprehensible in the enjoyment of his trumpeted callousness to circumstance, and if June, as being by inheritance a child of nature, chose the former part, there is no one who shall say it was the worse part of the two. For like all rebels, she did penance daily for her indulgence, never guessing that her alternate fierceness and dumbness were her luxury, nor that she cried out from her narrow house as one cries into a hollow vessel that throws the lament back into his teeth again.

She was possessed by that feeling of continuous uncertainty

that follows a rapid contrast of fortunes. Earthquakes were invented before Farmer George insisted on his kingship, but the sensation they cause is eternally new, since I cannot explain to you exactly how the earth trembles horribly under me, nor will your glib description of the comparative remoteness even of a slight vacillation give me confidence when the very ground yawns and not one familiar object retains the habit and relation in which I once knew it.

So June stood betwixt heaven and earth, criticising heaven not a little, and scorning earth, which gave her at the moment such poor foothold.

She realised daily that she belonged now to no one. Till Conway could earn the occasion for claiming her openly, she stood in effect in a more solitary position than in her child's days. Her father seemed further from her than ever. He never read the news or talked of his friends, and June knew that the money which kept the household fed during those sad weeks was borrowed.

Mrs. Newbery, jogged by her son, came to visit Lady Mildred.

"I was a Podmore of Podmore," she explained, sighing deeply, but with a good-humoured smile, and proceeded to explain that Podmore had passed into alien hands, and that the spirit of the Podmores, rather than permit itself to wail at its ancestral gates through the windows of a deserted stucco lodge, had sought fresh pastures.

"That is all because of this dreadful law of entail," she said. "We poor women do not count, Lady Mildred. I ought now to be the lady of the manor, and Jack its lord; but the attorneys manage to settle these little matters, being men, and so it has gone to a kinsman."

"She has survived it and looks monstrous prosperous though, my lady," grinned her son; "don't she now, Lady Mildred?"

"Oh! it is all very well for you young bloods," said his mother, holding up a fat finger; "but you are cocks of the walk everywhere. Even the Royal ladies——"

"Not the old begum, by Gad, mother."

"Well, well, the Queen is the Queen; but look at her daughters and look at her poor little grandchild who is heir to the throne. The late Princess Amelia used to say to me, 'Dear Mrs. Newbery, my heart aches for little Char. They will never let her come to the throne.' She used to say it often, sitting as close as I am to you, Miss Cherier, with her sweet eyes full of tears."

"Where is the Princess Charlotte now?" said Lady Mildred, whose languid air had quite vanished.

"She wanted to go to Weymouth, but they would not let her, and she has to stay at the Lower Lodge, you know, with the Dowager Duchess of Leeds, who is always more or less in hot water, poor lady, with the Queen and the Prince; and as for Cornelia Knight, the *gouvernante*, she is their last bone. The poor creature came to me half hysterical after trying to please them both; but the Prince of Wales pulled hardest, and so he has got her, and the Queen is without her tag. It is a pity, Miss Cherier, you cannot attire yourself in a cap and glasses like Miss Knight and put Mrs. Beckersdorff's nose out of joint a little. She is rampant at Windsor now Miss Knight is no longer with the Queen."

"If I were the Queen, I would rather be served by youth and grace than by a piece of elderly buckram," said the secretary, who had entered, and June coloured angrily, the more so that she was conscious that he could divine both her new ambition and her rebellion, and that it gratified him to feed both.

Mrs. Newbery's wide-mouthed lad tumbled easily into the secretary's pretty snare.

"That's a true word," he said. "What a golden tongue you have, Mr. Frewin; hasn't he, mother? Now I should never have put the words properly, miss; but Lord! I should have meant them all the same."

"Tis the beauty of mind which you possess, Tom, and that weighs more than words," said the secretary.

"You will never make a courtier of him, Mr. Frewin," laughed his good-humoured parent. "He is too simple and devoid of motives. But upon my soul," turning to Lady Mildred, "I should be delighted to befriend Miss Cherier here. And now I come to think of it, I can speak to Princess Elizabeth, who is coming to drink tea with me to-morrow and to tell me all about the young Duke of Brunswick. What! You hadn't heard? Oh! yes, and perhaps—I only say *perhaps*—the Duke will ride over from Coombe Wood, where he is shooting with Lord Liverpool. Is the affair likely to come to a head, Mr. Frewin? You know these things better than I."

"If the Queen cannot get her debts paid by Christmas, madam, she will doubtless be glad enough if her daughters will run away with her gardeners; it would save their wedding outfit."

"You know too much, you gossip," said the laughing dame, as she climbed up into her hired green chariot, whilst Tom

dutifully packed in her hoops, and bowed grandly to the window where June stood watching the departure.

But it was now a week since any new face had broken in upon the monotony of life in Soho, and June, whose dreams of splendid distinction and independence had grown into the very fibres of her existence, found that they had sustained her but poorly. Each morning she rose, eager for the day, and went to rest heavy-eyed, weary, and scornful of the niggardliness of fate towards her. She began to look again hungrily for Conway's letters; but none came.

Growing impatient, she wrote once more, and then her letter was big with news.

"I am going to Windsor, to Windsor. Can you believe it? I am to see the Queen, and if it meets with her arrangements she may give me a place in the Household. It is all in the balance, and I am literally quaking from head to foot, my dearest Con. Am I sedate enough? Am I as tall as is fitting? Shall I please her? Mrs. Newbery says I must know German, and I could never master it, the dreadful stuff. It always seems like lumpy porridge. And my French is poor in speaking. There is no call for the odd bits of Greek that you taught me when we two sat with our feet in a pool in the old Tyne. I am so excited I can scarcely write to you. Answer me and tell me you are glad for me. God bless you, my sweet boy. Do not think I am heartless in my Glee and forget my father. Some plan will be made for him by Mr. Frewin. You know he is now playing the pipes to get a secretaryship somewhere else. Mamma is grown very civil to him again because he has brought about this meeting with Mrs. Newbery, and my father treats him with great respect. But I keep him at a grand distance, as becomes me."

She tossed her head as she wrote and then she went to the little mirror in her tiny bare room and clambered on to a chest that she might see herself full under the skylight. Presently she walked up and down imagining herself at a State ball dancing with one of the Royal dukes, and she felt as bold as a battalion and as full of resource as a modish coquette.

* * * *

Now it is one thing to conceive a situation and mould it to yourself as to a comfortable pivot and another to find that in its fulfilment you play a very small part, and one which exacts much courage. June dreamed of a dazzling presentation, with the Queen's drawing-room ablaze with lights.

It was infinitely harder to be composed when taken by

surprise. Mrs. Newbery had conducted her to see the views from the terrace, and while they walked, some sightseers called out that the Queen was coming, at which June's heart began to flutter wildly, and she could barely stammer in reply to Mrs. Newbery's expressions of manifest delight. A group of gentlemen and ladies walked up the terrace slowly. Mrs. Newbery curtsayed deep to an elderly beau who came a little in advance, tossing a ball to his dog. He had his hat pulled down over his eyes. If anything could have turned the girl's trepidation into laughter, it was the ludicrous fashion in which Tom Newbery bowed, peeping forward inquisitively under the broad brim, until the Duke of York, for it was he, could hardly keep from laughing at the good-humoured, uncouth phiz that was thrust into his path. Three ladies, who might be called young, in grey pelisses of exactly similar pattern, walked behind him, and the one who had brighter eyes and fuller colouring than the other stopped when she saw Mrs. Newbery, and held out her hand, saying :

"How do you do? I thank you for your letter, and have showed it to the Queen, who is much pleased at your exertions on her behalf."

"Miss Cherier is with me, madam," said Mrs. Newbery, ducking deep over the Princess Elizabeth's hand, "if I may present her to you?"

"Now do."

June mustered a curtsy and saw a friendly gleam in the face of the bright-eyed plain-featured Princess.

"So you have never been to Windsor before?" she said kindly, "and I am sure you could not have a more perfect cicerone than Mrs. Newbery, who knows all the legends of the Castle far better than I do."

Then she moved aside quickly and dropped in her turn a miniature curtsy. Mrs. Newbery pressed June's arm in warning, and drew her back. Turning quickly, and shrinking shyly against the low terrace parapet, June saw within a few paces a lady of middle height, who leant upon a gold-headed ebony cane. She moved stiffly and without any change of expression. She carried no muff like the Princesses, and wore silk mittens, her hands showing but few rings. Her hoop was of glossy black satin, piped and flounced, and her hat was of brown beaver, high-crowned, with a large brown rosette and velvet strings. She wore a spencer, ermine-trimmed, of mustard-coloured French cloth, with bell sleeves, and the white lawn and lace handkerchief round her shoulders was pinned

on her breast with a gentleman's miniature set in pearls and turquoises. Her eyes were close together, and very keen and bright, like those of the Princess Elizabeth, but her mouth was more pinched, and the length of the upper lip narrowed the face, while two deep lines on either side of the pointed chin gave the lie to the smooth bloom on the high cheek bones and the redness of the mouth, which was accentuated by the whiteness of the piled-up hair. As she passed she bowed gravely first to the right and then to the left, walking quite alone, two gentlemen in attendance several paces behind.

Princess Elizabeth turned to meet her, and said something in a low voice: then beckoned to Mrs. Newbery, who presented June.

The Queen's face relaxed for a moment. She was evidently pleased at the girl's appearance. June's increased pallor made her small clear-cut features look ethereal, and her manner, though she did not know it, was abnormally composed.

"You are making some stay here, I think?" said the Queen. Her voice sounded very far off and dim to June, who had scarcely breath to falter a "Yes, madam."

"Then Mrs. Newbery must bring you up to help us with our Christmas preparations. We think a great deal of Christmas at Windsor, and begin months before to make toys for the poor, and clothes."

She signalled an attendant duenna. A stout yellow-faced lady hurried forward.

"Madame Beckersdorff, this is Miss Cherier, a friend of Mrs. Newbery. I shall give her into your charge when she comes to-morrow. I shall be glad if you will come up and spend the afternoon, Miss Cherier, and perhaps Mrs. Newbery will escort you."

She passed on with a slight gesture of dismissal and the rest followed, but Princess Elizabeth turned to give a friendly nod to both the ladies and whispered to Mrs. Newbery, "Mamma is pleased."

Mrs. Newbery was in hilarious spirits for the rest of the day, and chattered continuously of the Royal Family and their virtues and their vices, upholding both in equal measure, and delighting perhaps most of all in the latter, which as she declared, proved the claim of all rulers to the faithful support and undying devotion of their subjects.

"For," she said, "they are so excellent in their goodness that it would be strange indeed if they did not sometimes slip profoundly; and if they did not slip at all they would have no ears and no heart to understand the weakness of their people,

who are the responsible item after all, since they will have a sovereign and a court, and expect their grand puppets to dress up and show themselves."

"Hear her, Miss Cherier," chuckled Tom. "This is the way she lectures to me, till I do not know whether 'tis not the greatest virtue to become the worst rake and the most detestable sponge in Mayfair."

"I wonder whether you would find it so easy, Mr. Newbery? I have heard it said that to be a true rip takes as long as to grow good medlars," said June, who had recovered her spirits and her native impertinence.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SIP FROM THE CUP OF AMBITION

It was arranged that Mrs. Newbery should leave June at the Castle for the day and that she should be escorted back in the evening. The good lady stayed an hour, just to hear the gossip of the household in order to amuse her own circle on a future occasion, and when she left, Madame Beckersdorff came to summon June to the Princesses. They were in a pleasant morning-room, looking out on to the west side of the Castle. A large work-table was in front of them, with a quantity of beads and scraps of silk and cardboard, and Princess Elizabeth, who looked up brightly and said "Good morning" as the girl entered, had an air of great business. Her nimble fingers were flashing in and out of her silk and cardboard, and she appeared to be indeed bursting with Teutonic ingenuity. The pile of litter on the boxes and the useless, ribboned ornaments on the table seemed to grow visibly as she worked.

"Come here," she said to June, "and tell me whether you do not think these colours fine. They are bits of our Court trains, Princess Augusta's, you know, and mine, and Princess——"

"How you can go on twiddling and fiddling over those dull things, Elizabeth!" said Princess Augusta, yawning as she put down the romance she was reading.

"One must accomplish something, Augusta."

"She is tired," said another lady who came through the door leading into an inner apartment. She had very gentle eyes; not bright or clever, but soft and sad. She was paler than the others. June curtsied.

"This is Miss Cherier," explained Princess Elizabeth, and then said some words in a low tone to Princess Mary.

"Are you fond of needlework?" she asked June.

June blushed and stammered out that she was not skilled, but was ready to assist.

"Oh! I am so glad you are not horribly proficient," said Princess Augusta, who flashed into vivacity for a moment. "I find stitches so difficult, and Mary is so exacting."

"Hush," said Princess Mary gently.

"Very well, Mary. But you cannot have Miss Cherier now. I want to talk to her. Come here, Miss Cherier. Pray sit down; you'll have enough standing presently when the Queen sends for you." June took her seat on a velvet stool nervously. "Now do tell me what is going on in town? And are the bonnets worn flat or high?"

The modes were not June's strong point, but she mustered recollections of Lady Mildred's teaching.

"The hats are worn high, ma'am."

"There!" said Princess Augusta. "Did I not tell you so, Bet? And mamma has ordered all our new bonnets as flat as crack-backs. It's Madame Beckersdorff's fault."

"Oh! ma'am, do you have crack-backs in the south?"

"Of course—water-cakes; Princess Mary makes them superbly. Why?"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, I did not mean to question you; but the name made me think of Heughside and my home."

"Oh! Where is that?"

"In Northumberland, madam. It seems very far away."

Princess Mary caught the note of forlornness in the girl's voice, and looked at her kindly.

"But you will be able to go back sometimes?"

"No, ma'am. The house is sold."

There was a soft pattering knock at the door.

"*Sa Majesté désire voir Mademoiselle Cherier,*" said a little lady who entered.

"Oh! dear La Fite," said Augusta, tossing her book aside, "you are the very person I want. Do get me a nice love story. I have yawned myself sick over these memoirs about men and women who never did anything they really wanted to do, but only what they ought to do in case the world ever should know their history."

The *gouvernante* held up her finger with an air of motherly remonstrance.

"Oh, Madame! And after all the trouble I have had to impress on you the literary truth and beauty—*l'artème de ces mémoires!* Will you permit me to talk about them presently?"

But first I must show this young lady to the Queen's apartment."

June followed in silence. The little Frenchwoman turned as she was about to knock at the Queen's closed door and made an exclamation.

"*Chérie*," she said quickly, "we will not go in this minute. You have such a white face. It will not do to faint, *sous le nez de Madame*. Come to my room an instant. There, there." She put June into a chair. "Now rest and think of nothing, and I will talk. You have *le vertige*? Oh, yes, every one has that at first, you know. But it is not true that if your hated rival stabs you stealthily in the Royal presence you are to go on standing up as a corpse. I remember Madame d'Arblay used to say things like that, but they are not at all true. I myself, when I was with Madame d'Angoûleme as a girl, was under the impression that you must be a wax figure in the presence of the great—speechless and smiling. Oh! *mon Dieu*, one day at a reception my shawl pin broke and went through my stays into my chest bone. It was agony, but I did not flinch, and I did not scream. The Dutch Ambassador was talking to me at the moment. I replied with raillery; but the excruciating pain came when madame dropped her fan. It was the place of his Excellency to stoop, but he was too stout. Madame looked at me impatiently, and there was nothing for it but to bend. When the reception was over I fainted instantly, but I remember explaining to the Ambassador that his heavy Artillery had entirely annihilated my Lancers. It was at the time of Walcheren, my dear. The *mot*, though I have forgotten the exact words, went the round of the Tuileries. You look better. You have spirit, I see. You will want it. Listen to me—beware of the German. If the Queen engages you permanently, you will perpetually have to fight Mrs. 'Becky.' Now are you ready? Then come."

The Queen was alone, to June's huge relief. She had a little basket of keys by her, and a writing tablet on her knee. She was wearing the same kerchief, but there was a large muslin cap on her head, a little stiffer than those worn by the young Princesses, and her black satin hoop she had exchanged for a clinging snuff-coloured gown. Attached to the velvet ribbon round her throat was the miniature June had noticed on the previous day—the face of the King whom no one ever saw.

"Are you good at reckoning up the per cents?" was the first question the Queen asked when they settled to business. "No? Well, you must learn. All knowledge is useful, and I

want you to look after the accounts of the Princesses—not Princess Elizabeth's, but those of the Princesses Augusta and Mary. Now I want you to write some letters from dictation."

June seated herself at the round spindle-legged table indicated, and took the quill. Her nervousness left her gradually. She had always been a good penwoman; the act of tracing the fine characters gave her a feeling of physical pleasure. They were not soul-stirring records that she wrote to order—commissions to a haberdasher, or communications with the gentlemen of the Green Cloth about the Windsor cellars. The Queen had a handful of letters in her hand, and walked slowly and stiffly up and down the room, sorting them while she dictated and marked off each on a list. A longer silence prevailed than usual, and the footsteps ceased. June, lifting her head timidly, saw the Queen looking at a note with an angry frown and tightened lips. An exclamation of displeasure fell from her. She rang her little silver bell sharply and Madame Beckersdorff entered.

"When did this come from the Lower Lodge?" said her Majesty in German.

"Half an hour ago, ma'am."

"Who brought it?"

"The Duchess of Leeds's man, ma'am."

"That suffices, Madame Beckersdorff."

The German vanished.

"Are you ready, Miss Cherier? 'The Queen is glad to hear from the Duchess of Leeds that the Princess Charlotte is sufficiently recovered to support the journey from London, and will be ready to see her at the time named to-morrow. She can on no account consent to the postponement of the visit, and requests that her Grace will be in attendance.' Fold the paper three times and address it to the Duchess, and give it to Madame Beckersdorff, who is in the room across the corridor. Then return, for I have something to say to you."

"How old are you?" said the Queen, when June had noiselessly glided back to her place.

"Twenty, madam."

"Then you have arrived at common sense. I will be frank with you." She assumed a brisk air, the demonstratively honest air that a peculiarly secretive nature will sometimes adopt. "The Princess Charlotte is likely to be here from time to time—indeed, it is possible that she may shortly be removed from Warwick House altogether. In that case it will be necessary for her to have a companion nearer her own

age. For the present, I can enter into no arrangement on this head ; but I am in need of an extra hand, and the Princesses are glad of company. I propose, therefore, that you begin your duties at once. Miss Pircote, who married some time ago, received £200 per annum and provided her own travelling expenses. I think the sum should be sufficient for you."

"You are very good, madam."

"It will be needful for you to have a proper outfit. Your uniform will be necessary, and for that I will put you into Madame Beckersdorff's hands."

So the great fact had come about. June had passed within the magic pale. She was no longer a pale country girl full of dim imaginings and fierce instincts. She belonged to the courtiers whom she had imagined in the dreams she had dreamt in the grey days in Soho. This was the moment before she should step into a circle of splendid ease and gorgeous idleness. This was the lifting of the curtain. Her ears were buzzing, her eyes bright. She had forgotten the letter to the haberdasher and the vague horror that dawned upon her when the Queen had mentioned the per cents.

She stumbled over a carved chest in the corridor and her ring tapped against her neck. For a moment she stood still, remembering her position. It appeared to her that she stood there for hours. There was the possibility that Fate might even now thrust her back into nonentity. A fierce anger rose in her heart against Fate ; but she would set her teeth and fight it for the possession of her secret. For the moment, at least, she could turn her face to the new life without fear. She longed to taste it—nay, the shortest sip would be better than nothing. Conway could not forbid it. And then there came a flash of remorse across her rebellion. Her boy, her lover, the woods, the river, his arm stealing about her, and his warm cheek bending to hers—had these things been forgotten? She pulled her ring out of its hiding-place and put it remorsefully and reverently to her lips, but there was no passion in them. As the circlet slipped back, and she pinned her brooch over the folds of her bodice, she awoke to a sudden sense of recklessness, of intrigue. She rejoiced in the risk and the concealment once more.

She walked forward quickly with eager delight, forgetting her mission, and lost herself hopelessly in a series of passages and steps. She feared at first to knock at any one door lest it should incense some august personage ; but a longing seized her to rap loudly and then hide. This was a palace,

and she a part of it. She began to run on tiptoe, spreading out her arms.

"It is all mine," she said to herself. "This is the place of kings and queens and princes; the governors of the people walk here. The news of the world is poured in through these gates. This is the highest place of all, the place of knowledge. Here is power to move things. The world like a great picture lies below. It will unroll itself. I have but to stand and look from the place that is mine. I am myself; and my place has been appointed to me. I know that I exist; I live. I am June Cherier."

She laughed aloud, and her laughter echoing down the lofty corridor suddenly frightened her. "June Cherier, June Cherier," the walls seemed to laugh in derision. Her brooch became unloosened, and the ring that dangled on its ribbon swung out of its place. She clutched it nervously, for a step was coming up the corridor.

"Vat are you doing here, miss?" said the German attendant brusquely. "De Queen thought you were wid me. Mrs. Newbery has come for you."

CHAPTER XIX

A LESSON IN COURT MATTERS

THE next fortnight was full of business. It was necessary for June to return to London for her outfit. She lived and moved in a happy dream. Warm airs seemed to lap her round, sweet voices seemed to be calling to her. She almost grew to love the little squalid house in Soho for sheer contrast with those vasty corridors of Windsor. She felt a tender indulgence towards its shabbiness. She would light all the candles she could of nights, and wear the new clothes that were being fashioned for her. She even rallied her father with patronage, and he, poor man, charmed out of his dejection, would steal looks at her, still too much of the northerner to show his pride openly. She made a grand effort to be sad when it came to the good-byes; but her heart was bubbling with expectation. It was almost with irritation that she waved her hand to the group at the door and thought with delight that she was under Mr. Frewin's escort for the last time as far as Slough, where the Queen's carriage was to meet the Princess Elizabeth, when June should be there to attend her Royal Highness home. She rode in the rumble of the Slough coach, and was

free from further blandishments on the part of the secretary. There was not much time to gossip at Slough, for the Princess was waiting.

June's services were not required that evening at the table, and she dined alone with Madame La Fite. The lively little lady interrogated her narrowly as to her antecedents, her experience of the world, her capabilities, until the maid of honour felt herself indeed a poor thing by the side of so much alertness.

"I am not adroit," she answered regretfully at last. "I know nothing of the great world, and I do not understand these women of fashion. "Tell me, do you think I shall make a good courtier?"

"Can you walk? Let me see. *Bien, bien*, you have the right air, my child; but I will tell you one thing—you must not be too quick with your tongue. Royal persons want their ladies to be a pretty piece of putty. If there is a little bit of a trouble, the lady comes between it and the Royal personage. You must also be accomplished, but only show it when desired. You may spout an ode, *comme un jet d'eau*; but you must stop it the moment Madame lifts her head. You must have blood and tears ready when they are needed. It is for all this that you are to have £200 a year, my child. You must learn to put your fingers on your lips perpetually. Only when you have lived under this immense roof do you learn to know the enormous power of silence. It is 'Hush, hush!' always, both indoors and out of doors. You may see as much as you like. There is a doorway which conceals the King. About that doorway it is always 'Hush!'" She looked about her with a magnificent assumption of patronage. "The poor fellow! It is he who is the piece of putty that keeps the Royal Family together just now, and if it were not for him, there would be a furious outburst among the people. I mean it—a revolution."

"Oh! how terrible!"

"It is these Germans," said Madame La Fite.

"But the Queen is a German," cried June.

"Hush-sh! Have you forgotten already? You must not say that here."

"But she speaks with an accent."

"My child," the Frenchwoman smiled scornfully, "Madame is English. Please understand that once for all."

"But I thought that Mecklenburgh——"

"You must not think—not aloud. It is true Mecklenburgh is in Germany, but it is Madame's business to remind the

nation of that as little as possible. There has been too much of it in the past, alas! And the German attendants that are retained are beyond expression distasteful to me."

June thought of Mr. Heseltine's remark.

"Ah! Pah, now my blood is up, there is nothing with which I would not credit a German," said La Fite, almost prancing up and down the apartment. "Their pushing ways show their base origin. They will never leave a thing alone. They will badger you and smear you till they have poked their way under your nose. They are always cocksure. They always know everything, they tell you. But that is like most of those Russians and Teutons. They treat England as if it were a harvest field. Look at Madame de Lieven and her airs. Look at the Baron Roden and the nice little plums that drop into his mouth. Who do you suppose put them there? Heaven? Not at all. Madame herself, just because they squeeze her and press her, and work upon her native patriotism. Oh! she is ambitious. God and these Germans only know how ambitious! She has been a good mistress to me, as Royal persons go, and I should not be retained here but for her tolerance, for my pupils, the Princesses, are long since out of tutelage, as you may imagine when I tell you that the youngest is nearly thirty."

"Is Princess Mary likely to marry the Duke of Brunswick?"

"*Ciel!* you know too much already." Madame threw up her hands in comic despair. "Who told you of the intrigue? Oh, I see; it is Mrs. Newbery."

"Does he love her very much?" asked June eagerly.

"I think that she loves him, poor girl. But he—What do we want another German for? He has not a penny. His poor old mother can scarcely afford enough furniture for a parlour. His sister is in high disgrace."

"His sister?"

"The Princess of Wales. Oh! la, la! you have a lot to learn, my sweet child, and you will find out that love at Court is not all blisses and peace, and that love does not enter much into State alliances. It is no use to marry and to starve, whether one is a Princess or a *gouvernante*." She laughed brightly, yet not without a touch of bitterness, took June's hand and patted it, gently sighing. "You will think me an old silly, *eine alte Schraube*, as that stupid Beckersdorff would call it in her unpronounceable tongue, for talking to you; but love, my dear, has always been the greatest joy of my life—only to dream of it, I mean." She drew herself up primly. "Just to

imagine how beautiful it is! Now, you will experience it, Miss Cherie, and you must prepare for it with ardour. Do not be coy, but bold. The heroine of my *rêve d'amour* is at once a humble, bold, and fearless creature, but she does not push. She is not a German, *absolument non.*"

She fell back in her chair, laughing merrily.

CHAPTER XX

AN EPISODE OF GALLANTRY

NEXT morning the Queen rose earlier than usual, and did not attend to her correspondence, but was closeted for a long time with a gentleman of the Court who, it was understood, had come from Carlton House on the previous evening. June assisted the Princess Elizabeth in making a cap, but the princess's dresser arrived before half an hour was over, to summon her mistress to the Queen, and June withdrew.

The sun had struggled through the mist at last, and she looked from her chamber windows on to Staines and the grey river. The sound of wheels interrupted her. She saw out-riders and a closed coach. It vanished round a corner of the drive before she could see the occupant. By this time she was dying of curiosity, for while passing the Queen's closet she had heard angry words. It seemed indeed as if the Duke of Clarence had suddenly acquired eloquence, for his voice it was that spoke so volubly. Her quick ear had caught the tones. And yet, was it perhaps the voice of the gentleman visitor?

She heard doors open and shut sharply. She wondered, and wondered again. Initiation into State secrets seemed a slow affair. The sun was beginning to dance on the grey water. She suddenly bethought herself of a visit to Mrs. Newbery. It would not be difficult to run there by a short cut, and run back again. She put on her bonnet and cloak, and almost danced away, for the sun was good, and there was nothing to weight her footsteps. She took the quicker way by a side gate, nodded to a friendly sentinel, and began to thread her way under the trees. So intent was she on avoiding the soft, damp mole-hills on the bank above the lane that led to the river and the main road that she did not see that a gentleman approached by the same path. It narrowed, and there were brambles, and she had arrived almost at its narrowest point when she found herself confronted. A Northumbrian shyness came upon her,

and she faltered and almost slipped in the soft, moist pathway. The gentleman bowed low, and put out his hand to assist her, and June, remembering that she was no longer a bumpkin, curtsied. All this while she had not looked into his face. She merely sought to go forward; but he stood in the path, and she lifted her eyes in perplexity. They showed her a man of weighty presence, dressed like the beaux in whom the heart of her stepmother rejoiced. There was much glamour about him, and his full rich eye and the elegance of detail—his jewelled hands, his cane, forbade the impression of portliness that would have marred an apparition less proudly self-conscious or alert. So he stood in the pathway, smiling. June looked to right and left of him. Would he not take the initiative? Shyly she put her hand up to her hat-strings, and the north-west wind blew her cloak aside, and showed her scarlet facings. The gentleman took off his hat, with a slight exclamation.

"Good morning, madam. Is her Majesty well?"

"Quite well, sir."

"And what does one of her Majesty's ladies abroad so early?"

June's pride stirred.

"For that, sir," she replied, "I am answerable only to her Majesty, not to strangers. I wish to pass. Good morning."

"Upon my honour, madam, I had no intention of pressing inquiry. It was rather with intent to break the silence of lips so sweet that I presumed to interrogate. Pray be kind," and he doffed his hat once more, with an expression in which contrition and austere reverence were exquisitely mingled.

At the same moment it came over June that she was indeed playing truant, and that it might go hardly with her if she were discovered talking to a strange gentleman beyond the Castle precincts. She bent her head shyly, and gathered up her skirts to pass on.

And still the gentleman stood in her path.

"I do not wish to deter you from the Queen's business," he said quickly, and with purpose, "but you must know the paths here better than I. Can you perhaps tell me which of the two I should take through the park? As a boy I knew the way well. I left my carriage half a mile back. Can you guide? Nay, better still, let me escort you on your errand, and we will make the return journey together, if you are so minded, for the Queen expects me this morning."

The gleam of humour in his face which had somewhat disconcerted June now flashed into prominence,

She began to lose her self-possession.

"Indeed, indeed, my business is unimportant."

"In other words, the business of her Majesty will do at any time, madam?"

"Sir!"

"I am too much honoured if you will postpone it on my behalf. On my oath it shall not be visited upon you, madam."

"Sir—I——"

"Let charity guide you, while you shall guide me, and so, guided by sweet charity doubly personified, I shall attain my purpose, not without happiness by the road. The Queen waits. Listen, the clocks are within fifteen minutes of the hour. Pray be kind."

The spirit of adventure came to her mind. The major force opposing her was sufficient excuse for yielding, and instinct made June adaptable. She caught some of the stranger's extravagance of carriage. This time her curtsy was less frightened, and a smile softened her mouth, while her eyelids drooped haughtily—a way she had seen in women of quality. The gentleman pushed the boughs aside to widen the pathway, and offered his arm with a grand, impersonal air.

"You are newly arrived at Windsor, madam?"

"Indeed, yes."

"I do not remember to have seen your face at a Drawing-room?"

"No, sir; circumstances postponed my introduction at Court, but the Queen has been pleased to overlook this, and has honoured me by receiving me, temporarily at least, into her service. It is but a month since I came. You go to the Drawing-room officially, sir?"

"Officially, most certainly."

There was growing amusement in her companion's face.

"And do you go to Carlton House also? They tell me that it is a very beautiful palace. Is the host such a splendid Prince as they say?"

"Ah! fair sceptic," answered the gallant, with extravagance, "the splendour that could run the gauntlet of your gentle criticism must have its foundation in an Eldorado of virtue. Is he such a splendid Prince? You will see him and judge. He prizes nothing so much as honour, chivalry, and reverence for beauty. If he is idolatrous, it is to beautiful woman's heart that he bends the knee. Of that be assured."

He kissed her hand with magnificent humility.

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"His Royal Highness has a hearty advocate," she returned, a little embarrassed as they began to climb a slope.

"How beautiful is the morning!" he said abruptly, turning as they mounted.

She was forced to dig one little heel into the long damp grass lest she should fall forward.

"Beautiful!"

He appeared to forget everything in contemplation of the scene before him. Irritation came to her. It was increased by the fact that when she tried to withdraw her hand from his arm, she found that he courteously retained it between his sleeve and the galloon of his coat pocket. She stole a quick side glance at him. His full, authoritative profile was lifted in a fine abstraction towards the east. Down a bridle-path on the left rode a horseman. He was only a speck on the leaf-flecked road. June's companion apparently saw nothing. The rider disappeared, and reappeared as the path twisted.

"The sun seems to kiss the dying oaks," said the stranger.

"Can you see the glade yonder?"

June craned her neck politely.

"Come a step higher."

She obeyed, feeling somewhat helpless, annoyed at this delay in her intentions.

"It is easier to see the view from the terrace," she replied briefly.

"No, that is too topographical for our eyes."

"But my foot, sir, is slipping in the wet."

"You can see better if you lean on me, thus."

"Indeed, sir."

He disengaged her, and waved his arm towards the vista.

"No one knew the sun's force better than the Greeks, madam, but it is the modern poets that truly fathom his puissance. Those thought of him as a mighty archer, with unerring shafts. These extol him as the Deity of Nature's kisses. See how like a woman's brow is that slope—urbane and pure. Apollo cannot but kiss it, even as he would salute yours, most lovely maid."

He smiled and took the hand that had been on his arm in his left, slipping the other arm about her with extreme grace and adroitness. A thrush overhead sang a note of warning. The rider, who had dismounted, was leading his horse towards them. Surprised evidently at finding persons of distinction in so tangled a spot, he looked at them with curiosity. Suddenly he stopped in amazement, started as

though he would have crashed through the hedge that severed him from them, and taking off his cap waved it eagerly.

June saw the figure, and the gesture. Her heart stood still. That her husband should come upon her in such a situation! She pushed away the stranger's arm angrily. Her one impulse was flight. But before she could move, Conway vaulted the barrier and sped towards her, his face all rapture, mingled with suspicion when his eye fell upon the stranger.

"An intrigue, by all the gods!" said the latter, laughing heartily. "Ah! madam, you have laid a fanciful trap for me. I will make way for the younger beau."

"Indeed, sir," cried June, incensed at the double misunderstanding, "you think yourself marvellously cunning to have wasted the time of one of her Majesty's ladies in order to secure half an hour's amusement. I know not who you are, and care less. As for this gentleman, I knew nothing but that he was at least a day's journey from Windsor."

"This lady promised to guide me to the terrace," said the stranger to Conway; "but she is now displeased with me. I fear, sir, you find your mistress in a perverse mood, and that the tryst, through my clumsiness, is like to become what my friend Hook would call a *triste*."

"Sir! Who are you? What right have you to address this lady? I wear no sword when I ride, sir, but——"

The stranger laughed. He could not control his mirth.

"Sir," he said, when he found his voice at last, "this is all a joke. Time presses, and the Queen awaits me. Madam"—he doffed his hat finally to June—"you have access to her Majesty. Pray tell her that the Prince of Wales approaches her as fast as his feet can carry him from this spot to her. Sir, good-day to you. I do not cross swords with those whom I hope one day to greet as my subjects—nay, sir, as my friends."

He held the wicket open for June, who dropped a trembling obeisance and fled, blaming her indiscretion and the fate that showed her in a light so questionable and ridiculous; while Conway, cap in hand, stood open-mouthed in the pathway of the sun.

To pray the gods for adventure is verily to empty an inexhaustible cruse on your head.

CHAPTER XXI

PRINCESS CHARLOTTE STANDS AT BAY

"FIE, how wet your skirts are, Miss Cherier!" said Madame La Fite, who met June in a corridor as she hurried to her room.

"What is the matter? You look as if you would faint!"

"I have run fast and am giddy!"

"Madame is growing annoyed."

The *gouvernante* followed June to her room and helped her to arrange her dress.

"If the Queen should scold me!"

"Hum! She sent for you, and the Beckersdorff could find you nowhere. Why, you are trembling all over."

"Oh! I am terrified. Who is with the Queen?"

"*Toute la famille*, and a grand conversation they are having all about the Princess Charlotte. Did you not see her carriage arrive? The poor child dreads these discussions. Why, you are as frightened as if you had laid a Gunpowder Plot."

"It is nothing; the mist of the river is chilly."

"Come, now you are ready. The Beckersdorff is in the ante-room waiting to pounce. Pretend you do not see her; for nothing, my dear Miss Cherier, makes her so enraged."

To June's relief, however, the German was not there. Instead there was a footman, and a moment later she passed the further threshold.

The Princesses were grouped in the window in huddled fashion. The Queen sat very erect by the fire and spoke excitedly. The r's and the v's interchanged more than usual, and the b's became spitting p's. An elderly lady in black, with a crushed air, stood a little to the right of the Queen's chair; but the centre of attention was a young girl who stood opposite her Majesty. Her colouring was bright, and something like that of the Princess Augusta, but she was more slender, and her head, which drooped in tears, suggested unusual vivacity and impulse. Queen Charlotte motioned June behind her chair and was about to speak when the door opened wide, and the gentleman of June's adventure entered.

With a glance that embraced the whole room, he walked up to the Queen, and kissed her hand ceremoniously. After greeting the tremulous Princesses, he turned to the weeping girl.

"Tears, Char?" he said; "this is a sweet filial greeting."

The little princess threw her head back proudly.

"I did not know you would be here, papa."

"What is the meaning of all this?" He glanced angrily round the company. "Ah! Duchess," he turned to the lady in black, "you will help me. Tell me, has Princess Charlotte been breaking hearts, or spoiling hoops, or refusing to learn the harp?"

The Queen made a movement of displeasure.

"You know well, my son, that Charlotte is no longer a child in arms. It is a question of good manners and obedience. It is my desire that she should remain with me for the present. Her confirmation takes place at Windsor shortly. From that time, as it is fitting, she must be under the care of her nearest of kin. These notions of having a separate establishment in London are absurdity itself. From the hour of her first Communion to that of her marriage, a Princess of the Blood must be under the guardianship befitting her station. The law of the country demands it, the precedent is imperative, yet Charlotte refuses to comply with my wishes in the smallest thing. To-night, for instance, she is specially requested by me to attend a dinner, in celebration of her uncle's birthday, at Frogmore. She announces that she will return to London to-night. This is only one occasion out of many on which she has sought to isolate herself from her family. This behaviour, were it not ridiculous, would be insulting; but I have assured her that neither her aunts nor I wish for a sulky face at the birthday table. If Charlotte prefers her own society, she shall have enough and to spare; but in this matter of general independence I am resolute. Proper guardianship she must have."

Princess Charlotte raised her head. The light came back to her eyes, though the tears lay on her cheeks. She folded her hands quietly and faced her grandmother, speaking with a cold emphasis and a formality amazing in one so sensitive and so evidently at a disadvantage.

"The authority of the heart, madam, is the greatest of all. I do not refuse the guardianship which is my right, the love and care of my mother, the Princess of Wales. If I cannot have that, I will have none, and I care not what becomes of me, for I no longer have any joy in life. Oh! I have seen my mother suffer; I have heard her reviled. I, who am her child, must look on, and see it, and hear it. Nor can I give her any comfort. Even my visits to her are timed to the minute. Always, always, there is a third person to watch, to report. To whom? And why?"

"This is nonsense," muttered the Queen hotly.

But the sad young voice paid no heed to her,

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"Every honour that is done to me seems an insult while my mother is passed over, ignored. What is it you have against her? She is innocent. Seven years ago insults were heaped upon her, but she was innocent."

"Silence!"

"If I cannot have her guardianship, I would as lief be under lock and key, like my poor grandfather."

Those in the room who watched the Queen's face held their breath. Awed now by her own boldness and candour, Princess Charlotte hung her head. The Queen had risen to her full height, her eyes glittering with anger, her features pinched with acidity. She could scarcely enunciate.

"Charlotte, you have forgotten yourself entirely. Go to your Aunt Elizabeth's room and wait. You have abused all my leniency and must abide by my decision. Duchess, you will accompany Princess Charlotte." Then her Majesty seemed to remember June's presence with perturbation. "You have witnessed a disgraceful exhibition of temper on the part of the Princess," she said stiffly. "But you know the rule of the Court—silence."

June curtsayed deep. The Queen turned to her elder daughter.

"Mary, Charlotte is evidently over-wrought. Go to her. She has had too much London air. Miss Cherier, the Princess will lunch at the Castle, and you will hold yourself ready to accompany her for a walk in the gardens. To-night you will be free to dine and spend the evening with Madame La Fite. I shall not require you."

"Ah, this is Miss Cherier?" said the Prince of Wales.

Whiter than ever was June as she curtsayed again.

"Her name is quite familiar. Ha!—Newcastle riots. Surely the Mr. Cherier who saved the Whigs on that occasion was your kinsman?"

"My father, sir."

"I hope one day to have a means of showing my gratitude for the great personal service your father has rendered to me."

So sincere and earnest, so debonair and pellucid was his mien, that June's heart began to beat with hope. She did not yet know the value of the promises of those who give with one hand in order that they may take with the other. She forgot her surroundings, and saw in the Prince before her nothing but a future benefactor, a man of his word. She saw in imagination her father as he was in the old days, thick-set, vigorous, good-humoured, while he rode through his woods, and then she saw

him again as he stood with his back to the light in the doorway at Golden Square, wiping the pistol which had shot his beloved bay cob through the head.

Now she lifted her eyes in mute entreaty, as to the mountains of succour.

CHAPTER XXII

AN ADVENTURE IN THE LOWER GARDEN

THE Princess Charlotte who stepped on to the terrace a quarter of an hour later was a very different creature from the girl who had flown the banner of revolt in the Queen's face and cried out her anger in the sofa cushions of Princess Elizabeth's room. Cool defiance was now uppermost. Her eyes were bright and clear. She sighed with relief as she sprang out of a window which opened on to the grass. Madame Beckersdorff stumbled after her, asking June to close the window. Princess Charlotte heard it and scowled daintily.

"The grass is rather wet, Becky," she said pointedly; "it will give you what you call 'head-gout.'"

"I obey her Majesty's orders, madam," said the German.

"Come and talk to me, Miss Cherie," said the Princess. "Let me lean upon your arm. My knee ails; I have suffered from it for weeks, and a visit to grandmamma always makes it worse. Oh! the air is quite cold. Quicker!" She almost ran along with her hand on June's arm. "Quicker! I should like to walk straight away into the world there"—she pointed to the trees. "Quicker!"

Madame Beckersdorff panted and waddled, but the distance between them increased.

"How Becky puffs and blows!" said the mischievous young Charlotte. "You do not like her, do you?"

"Oh, madam!"

The Princess laughed, delighted.

"Oh, no! you do not. When I was a child I used to grow sick of her voice whenever I came to stay here. Quack, quack, quack. And Mrs. Schwollenberg too; I wish you could hear my mother take her off—Becky, I mean. Becky hates my mother, because she once caught Becky eavesdropping at Carlton House. That was before—before I was born, you know. My mother does not live there now. She is at Connaught House, the other side of the Park; but I like it best when she is at her house in Blackheath. In London,

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everything I say to her is repeated to the Queen. If I could only forget it!"

"Do not think of it now, madam; see, the sun smiles to give you courage."

Princess Charlotte's eyes filled with tears. She slipped her hand into June's.

"Oh! you have a heart. You feel. It is so sweet to find some one who feels. You can love; I see it in your face."

"It is true."

"And can you hate? I can hate. Oh! how I hate——"

"Hush, madam; let us forget it."

"But I cannot. If you knew what I suffer, how I am tossed about like a ball by my relations, you would know what it is to hate as I do. But you are not a spy, are you? Grandmamma did not bring you here for that."

She flung away the girl's hand and recoiled in horror at the suggestion.

"God forbid, madam!"

"Then you will help me to withstand injustice?"

"I will serve you, madam, so far as it lies in my power."

The deep blue eyes looked into the grey ones, and each saw in the other the reflection of a soul that battles.

"Love me—I want to be loved, Miss Cherier."

They were hidden from Mme. Beckersdorff by a thick clump of bushes.

"My name is June," said the girl as she held out her arms and the fair head drooped on her shoulder. It was a compact of a few seconds only, for already they heard the panting lady in the shrubbery.

Princess Charlotte started away.

"Spies! Becky is set to watch me to-day; but she shall not—we will give her the slip. Quick! There is a gate there and some steps. She will never be able to climb them again if she once goes down. These steps lead right down into the lower part of the gardens overlooking the park. Run; I hear her."

She took June's hand and ran on, and June, not daring to leave the Princess unattended, or snatch her hand away, followed in a manner little dignified, conscious that, though the Princess had vanished before the German appeared, her own retreat had been in no sense covered or explained. While she hurried on, the thought that Conway must be waiting for her somewhere at hand, suddenly came upon her. Anger at her want of presence of mind, astonishment at the suddenness

of his coming, regret that she felt so little prepared to welcome him, fought for mastery.

"Are we quite safe?" whispered Princess Charlotte, as she sank breathless on a mound. "You are sure that she is not peeping over at us? Now I feel happy; I can breathe. I could run and run to get away from grandmamma and my poor, frightened, silly aunts; but I would not run away from the poor old King. At any rate, he loves my mother. Do you know, I never can find out where he is. They say he is at Kew. But not always. Once I asked Uncle Clarence and he would not tell me. Are you listening?"

June was looking into the trees below. She thought she saw a figure moving there.

"Yes, madam, yes."

"Listen. Once," the Princess dropped her voice into a whisper, "I was walking down a side corridor. It was two years ago. I heard a strange murmuring through a door. Suddenly some one pushed it open softly, and a step came along. I was terrified and hid behind a curtain; and I saw it was my grandfather. He came towards me, tapping the floor with his stick, calling some one's name. I held my breath and listened for the words. He kept calling 'Hannah!' and then he said: 'Come to me, Hannah, my wife; I have come back to you.' Was that not strange? He looked so wretched and ill that I slipped out from the curtain and knelt down before him, and took his hand and kissed it, nearly crying. He was very puzzled, and then he put his hand on my head and said something in Latin and kissed me, adding, 'You are a dear child, but you are not Hannah'; and then he pushed me away almost roughly against the wall and tried to run down the passages."

"Oh!"

June turned, for she could have sworn that the black thing which she saw behind an ilex was a woman's black veil and no shadow.

"Is it not strange?" went on the Princess, full of her story. "And then grandpapa pushed me away almost roughly against the wall, and tried to run down the passages, calling more loudly than ever; but before I could move, the Queen—— Oh, how I hate her!"

"Hush, madam, I entreat you."

"She hurried out of a doorway below and caught me by the wrist, and took me away to her boudoir, and made me vow I would not tell any one what I had seen."

"Oh, hush! You are breaking your word, madam."

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"I do not care; she has not kept her word to me. She promised that I should see my mother once a week at least, and now I only see her once in two weeks, and I am never allowed to sleep under her roof."

"Hush, pray! This is incautious."

"She is afraid of something—the old Queen; and that is why I hate her. And I know why she is afraid lest grandpapa should be heard babbling in the palace." She whispered. A flush of excitement covered her face; her eyes shone with intensity. "I will tell you why. Grandpapa loved a beautiful Quakeress once, and her name was Hannah. He married her. It is quite true. Lady Anne Hamilton, who attends my mother, told her so. Hannah is really Queen. She was his real wife, in spite of all they say."

Pity, sorrow, and astonishment rendered June speechless. At last she found her voice.

"Alas! how will it assist your Royal Highness to recall this? It will not bring you happiness, dear madam."

"Happiness? I could not be more wretched than I am now."

She buried her face in her hands.

June turned apprehensively, and saw a woman glide from behind the trees and hurry towards them.

"A spy!" she gasped.

Princess Charlotte sprang to her feet with a low cry. She stood at bay, instinctively shielding herself behind her rank. June, even in that moment of suspense, admired the pretty dignity this child could assume when she chose. But her expression changed. June divined the happening of some miracle. There was a cry of joy. The lady threw back her veil, and with another cry Princess Charlotte flung her arms round the neck of the supposed spy.

"You, you? Oh, take me away!"

"It is impossible, *mein Engelchen*. I came *vid de coach*, like a poor market-woman. See here, my basket on my arm."

Then the speaker started. "Who is dis?" she said, shrinking back, with one arm still about the Princess.

"It is June Cherie. Grandmamma says she is to be with me when I come to stay at Windsor. I love her already. She is true."

The lady nodded graciously. The hunted look disappeared, and June noted that her face was not old or uncomely, and that her figure in her black robe was imposing.

"*Ach!*" she said, "Truth is a costly ting, Miss Cherie. It

will cost you a great deal." She laughed almost hysterically. "It has nearly cost me my child," she said, and began to weep bitterly.

The girl's heart was wrung to bursting, so profoundly was she moved by the sorrows of these two women, so great in their rank, so helpless in their sorrow. Here were things which she had never known, at the existence of which she had but dimly guessed when the gossip of the Court threw a light upon them here and there. Mr. Heseltine's words to her cousin flashed through her mind: "This is all the joy that Caroline of Brunswick knows."

"*Mein Gott, mein Gott!* How long must I wait for happiness?" sobbed the lady.

"Mother, do not grieve. See, I am with you."

"But they will imprison you here. *Mein Gott!*"

"Never!"

"And they will marry you to some one who will never let me come near you."

"Then I will run away to you."

June turned aside and retreated some paces off, not daring to withdraw without formal dismissal, terrified lest any one should burst upon the scene.

The elder Princess drew her daughter to a seat, and they talked in low voices; but the breeze brought a phrase here and there, and the words June heard seemed wrung from the heart of grief itself.

"It cannot be true."

"The Duchess of Leeds told me so, mother."

"*Ach!* what infamy!"

"But I will not go to Court if the Queen refuses to receive you, mother dearest."

"Alas! dat will only make dem angry wid you, my angel."

"I do not care."

But the little Princess could not restrain her sobs.

"*Ach!* my child, we have only enemies all round." Caroline started up, indignantly raising her voice. "*Mein Gott!* de begum shall swallow her words. I will stand dese cruelties no longer. Dis is de last straw, dat she should refuse to see me at de Drawing-room. *Ach, Gott!*" She flung herself weeping on her knees by her daughter. "What a poor devil am I—a Princess and no Princess, a wife and yet no wife, a mother that has losset her child! *Ach!*"

June's heart seemed to stop, for she heard too late the lifting of a gate-latch.

"Madam," she gasped, "I beg you to conceal yourself. I fear that some one comes who will recognise you."

Princess Charlotte started to her feet with a cry and clung to her mother. There was a distant clicking as of high heels, and the tapping of a cane on some steps. June knew the step and the tapping.

"Hide, madam, hide," she gasped, and pushed aside a thick hawthorn.

"I must go, my angel," whispered Caroline, disengaging her child's arms, "or the old hag will make your life a torment for ever."

"For God's sake, madam!" urged June.

There was no movement on the lawn, except that the bronze and crimson tresses of the berry-tree were stirred faintly by a passing wind, as the Queen rounded the winding steps and paced coldly to the seat against which the young Charlotte leant, half sick with terror.

"How dare you treat my orders to Madame Beckersdorff so lightly?" she snarled. "I said that you were to stay in the Upper Garden. You will come with me."

Slowly Princess Charlotte obeyed, not daring to raise her eyes. To June the Queen made a cold gesture to follow. But before she reached the steps a market basket, flung untidily in a bed of roses, caught her eye, and she paused.

"Go to the second gardener there"—she pointed to a conservatory below—"and tell him to clear away this disgraceful rubbish. Do not dawdle over the message, and, when it is delivered, come after me."

June tingled with dread lest the hidden lady should be discovered. She dived for a moment into a corner of the garden, to make sure that her Majesty could not see her; then she glided along till she reached the hawthorn. "Madam," she whispered, parting the branches stealthily, "Madam." But there was silence. June glided back to the rose-bed and snatched up the basket. She glanced up. The road was clear. She ran to the end of the garden, and thrust the basket hurriedly into a leafy clump, just in time to avoid discovery by the gardener, whose feet crunched the leaves on the other side of the laurels.

But it was no gardener who sprang towards her with open arms.

"You?" she almost screamed. "Oh! you must not be here."

"Then where?"

"I must see—I must find—— Tell me, you have not been here long?"

"I have but this moment come. A kindly gentleman, who, by his uniform, is of the household, told me I should find a way up to the Castle here."

"It was Colonel Goldsworthy. But you saw no one else—no one passing?"

"Not a soul."

"Oh! that is well."

"Why?"

He took her in his arms.

"Nothing, nothing. It is the Queen's business. Oh! I have forgotten that she told me to follow her at once."

She burst from his hold, and looked up in an agony of apprehension.

"I am staying in Windsor for a night. I have my tutor's permission. When shall I see you? Shall I come up to the Lodge?"

"No, no, I will meet you somewhere."

"Can you not ask permission to stay at Mrs. Newbery's, and come to me?"

"Mrs. Newbery is away; besides, it would be a lie."

"Then where shall I see you?"

"This evening, when the Royals dine at Frogmore."

"It will be safer after dark. But where? I have it—by the mole-catcher's cottage there, down in the orchard. It is but a step for you. I will lodge there for the night."

"At six. Let me go, or the Queen——"

She put up her hand to ward off his lips, and raced up the steps.

CHAPTER XXIII

A BATTLE OF WILLS

MADAME LA FITE had retired to bed with an attack of tic; Madame Beckersdorff had company in her apartment; Her Majesty and the Princesses had departed to Frogmore early in the afternoon, the equerries also, and Princess Charlotte had been driven back to London, her sad little face at the window of her father's grand coach.

June was utterly thankful to dine alone and expeditiously. While she snatched some food and arrayed herself in a long cloak that would hide her uniform, she was glad that the

crowded episodes of the afternoon had given her no time for thought, for dumb struggles, and useless heart-searching. Even now, as she hurried along the terrace and left the Castle behind, with feet that seemed to touch a molten floor, she was firmly resolute to put thought away. She was June Cherier still. The change of a name could make no difference in her. She was that and nothing less. More? She would make it more.

As she passed through the wicket on the hillside the scene of the morning came back to her, flooding eye and ear with fancies and alarms so vivid that she could no longer distinguish between fear and exaltation. She stood, panting, by the wicket, and untied the throat strings of her cloak. How could she be more than June Cherier? Was greatness a seed sown in the heart of men, and indestructible in its flowering and working? Had heaven placed it also in hers, to swell and grow and lift her to the stars? The fogram had once said to her that each man or woman was a mine of riches and power, with a birthright of human splendour. Splendour! It was a prodigious word. She thought of this gentleman who had stood before her that morning—of his manner and his poise. There was a certain splendour here. She clenched her hands with vexation that he should have treated her so lightly; but he was a Prince, and she had been foolish to chatter as she had done. She laughed to herself. A morning stroll with the Regent, his gallantry—the Regent's gallantry—her conquest, a clashing of bloods, and a Royal disclaimer, and, again, all this, as Madame La Fite would say, "*sous le nez de Madame*"—Mrs. Newbery's wildest romances, or the most perfervid adventures retailed by Mrs. Hester, could scarcely surpass such a record.

And yet it was not the splendour June desired. The reminiscence of it infuriated her. She was tortured by the imagination of a smile. Whose smile? Those curling, critical lips, clean shaven, above a square chin, with lines of humour arching from the nostrils. The stupid old fogram! What did he know of splendour—he who despised kings? She pouted; but the smile hovered before her, and the eyes above it pierced her.

"Now you are admiring your wings in the mirror," they said, "and think yourself mighty fine. Poor little creature!"

Frightened, she ran down the hill into the trees, and did not pause till she saw the light in the window of the mole-catcher's cottage. It was hardly yet the hour at which she had promised to meet Conway, but it was necessary to choose

a quiet moment for her exit, for fear of hindrance. She waited, leaning against a tree. The hill behind her rose dark and grey against the pale sky. Overhead there were heavy clouds, overlapping like an impasto of rugged oval slates in a gigantic roof. Just on the horizon they lifted, and showed a grey-green strip, against which the towers of the Castle stood out. The mist lay like a moat about the knees of the mount, except that it moved in waves and breaths, and seemed to catch on the whimsical and grotesque angles of the orchard branches. It made the near things seem strangely near, while all those which lay behind the veil were merged in one vast screen of grey, whose fretted edge, flat against the sky, looked like a thin and wretched partition, from which one must fall into the gaping universe. Such a notion makes the near and tangible things all the more precious.

The earth, where a portion of it, close to June's feet, had been turned by the spade, was rich, even in that dim light, with shades that burnt from brown to purple. It seemed to breathe. She slid, half sitting, into the low fork of the tree, and absently thrust her fingers into the soil. It was warm—much warmer than the grass. The warmth quickened thought. Emotion grew fiercer. She plunged deeper, and plunged in it yet again, drawing out a goodly handful of small clods to grind in her feverish fingers. There was a grit among the clods, a grit of the mount on which kings had dwelt, and given judgment, and whence they had come forth to their crowning and their burial. She took the grit between finger and thumb and ground it obstinately, till it crumbled and her finger touched something colder even than the mist. A worm! She flung it away with a shudder. A worm in the mount of kings! The earth was a common thing after all. Here, at her feet, were the infinitely little and the infinitely great; the thing that stands high and splendid, a monument for wonder and reverence. Here, too, was the thing which is trampled under foot—a worm, in the mount of kings! How pitiable it was! All her ambition was flown. She battled with herself, wondering if she could be the same girl that had dreamt away the years by the Tyne. Assuredly she struggled blindly after metaphysics; but this, in its most primitive form, is neither coals nor comfort when the shoulders shiver and the feet are pillowed in wet grass.

Suddenly the door of the cottage buried in the trees opened. June started and shrank against a friendly branch. The cold mist laid hold of her. Her teeth literally rattled. A crackling of boughs, a whish-whish of long grass, of which the sodden

blades seemed to whip the leather on the man's feet, an irresoluteness, a halt, and her name, at which she stumbled forward, crying :

"Oh ! I am so cold."

The boy's heart leapt as a man's heart leaps at an exhortation for the protection that his arms may give. It was Conway's pleasure to answer the cry by a royal gesture of envelopment.

"Where shall I take you, June ? To the cottage ?"

"Oh, no ! The man and his wife would know my face again, and I am wearing my uniform. I did not wait to change it, for fear Mrs. Beckersdorff should stop me. She is a terror. Oh ! I am so cold."

"You must come to the cottage. No ; look ! Is there not a rough shed there ? I have seen one of the gardeners put his tools there. That will be better, and the ground is dry. Come."

He almost carried her to it. A small cart was there, tilted on to its shafts. There was some soft dead grass at the bottom of it, and a sack. They climbed into the cart, and Conway pulled the door to, leaving a chink, that he might see her face.

"You still shiver," he said, and June could not answer for the chattering of her teeth. "My dear one, you are a Queen of Frost."

"The grass was wringing."

"Take off your shoes."

"That will make my feet colder."

"And your stockings, and I will kiss you into warmth."

"Oh, no, no !" she cried shyly, as Conway slipped off her shoes.

"Your stockings have been dipped in water. They are wet up to the instep."

His masterful hand pulled them off by the toes, and he stooped and took her icy feet in his palms.

"I am not a courtier, June," he said, "for I rather resemble the Coryn of whom I wrote to you than his Royal Highness ; but I can warm your pretty feet—see. Would your fine beau do that ?"

She pushed him away in indignation, and drew herself into a sitting posture, her feet tucked under her petticoat.

"My God ! Now I've hurt you. Did I not tell you, dearest, that I am a Coryn ? My blood runs red."

"I do not care how it runs. Give me my shoes."

"Not unless I choose."

He snatched them up, and held them high over her head—stronger, taller, more possessed than she.

But June knew that coldness takes the wind out of rhodomontade.

"Very well," she replied quietly, "since heaven appears to have bestowed upon you a yard or two more of arm than it has conferred on me, I will wait till you do choose. Meanwhile my feet suffer. And when you do choose, sir, I will straightway put on those shoes and go back to the Castle without another look at you."

The boy peered in her face and saw deadly earnest in her eyes.

"That is a new June that looks at me," he said, kneeling in front of her. "With those eyes you looked at me this morning, and I did not know what to make of you. But I comforted myself with the thought that the Prince Regent's declaration of his identity set your head in such a whirl, that you did not know man from man, or danger from safety. Thank heaven that I came when I did."

"I wish to heaven that you had done nothing of the kind!" she answered, irritated at his sententiousness. "Do you think that I—a Cherier——?"

"You are no longer a Cherier," he interposed defiantly.

She caught her breath in a little quick gasp.

"Do you think that I am a fool like my stepmother, and prefer gallantry to honour? All the Regents in the world should not entrap me."

She began to clamber out of the cart.

"Oh, June! I did not mean that. The Prince is a gentleman, dear. There are many who would be honoured by his mere compliments; but I am bound to protect you. My vows——"

"Hush! I know. Is some one passing?"

"Get back into the cart. I will not be clumsy again."

She fixed a wary eye on him, and consented to share the sack once more.

"I must protect that which is mine," he said proudly.

"I was vexed because I feared the Queen might hear of your coming."

"But you belong to me," he insisted, "not to the Queen."

"But if I lose her favour, where do I stand? A penniless girl, without interest; the daughter of a man who cannot even give me bread or a roof."

"You are mine."

"It is easy to say so."

Her tone was bitter. She would, I verily believe, have been

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glad had he put her on his steed then and there, and carried her before Lord Ibbs to make their joint confession.

"But you do, and you shall."

His powerlessness made his passion all the stronger. Her heart bounded with hope. Would he prove the stronger after all? She almost wished it. Then her helplessness, and a ghastly distrust of her own feelings and of the bond which held them so fast, found vent in a laugh. It maddened the boy. He bent over her and caught her hands.

"You do not believe me. The ways of a Court have changed you. I am wretched." Her heart ached that she could not reassure him. "In your last letter you wrote again to me that all our love seemed a phantom. You wake, you say, clutching at your ring like a drowning man. Look at me. It is not a phantom. You are my——"

She put her hand to his lips, and stopped the word.

"Does it so terrify you?"

She nodded, her mouth quivering.

"You have, by inference, said the most cruel thing any woman can say to her husband."

"Oh! I am not cruel; I am only afraid. The haste, the suddenness——"

She began to cry bitterly.

"Oh! very well, I know what is in your heart, June; it is that I married you and left you to your own devices. But fate has been against us. We will conquer fate."

So fine a platitude could not have been more heroically given. The rich colour in his face, the soft dark hair that curled on the boyish nape—June felt it, saw it, knew the fascination of it, and stifled the clamorous voice that cried her danger. In the northern woods on summer mornings she had put her cheek against those curls and drowned that voice before. After all she was helpless. In an honourable struggle for self-respect she put her lover first, as women will do. He loved her. She had doubted his firmness of purpose. She looked at him and was ready to kneel for forgiveness.

"Speak to me," he urged.

"Take your hands away," she pleaded.

He walked to the door of the shed and set it open a little wider.

"Now I can see you and the thoughts that pass over your face. This half light is so sweet, June—just like the paleness of your face." She was silent, but she held out her hand.

"You do not speak, while I have whole volumes to say. If

I could write the thoughts I have had of you these nights, they would make——”

“Some fine, dull tragedies, I daresay.”

“By heaven, June, they would be tragedies written with my heart’s blood.”

At the least suspicion of extravagance she froze.

“Since red is its colour, would not ink serve better? As we are both so poor, would it not be wiser to be less wasteful of the gifts of heaven?”

He retreated a pace or two in desperation, then flung his arms out.

“In Oxford,” he raved, “there is wealth enough stored up in musty portfolios to dower you like an empress. Miserly books that sap the lives and the youth of men, and turn them into soulless sticks—who wants them? And love starves for lack of a shilling. It is enough to make the stones of all the libraries weep blood. And yet I must slave— —”

“I, too, am a slave, Con, and my Royal mistress’s salary——”

“You shall not. I will not have it.”

“What else can I do? Oh, Con, we are not children any more. I wish that we were, I wish that we were.”

Her sobs came fast. He strode up and down the shed, raving below his breath.

“You know I said I would claim you as soon as I could. In May I will take my degree. I will go to Lord Ibbs then and ask for a larger allowance, and then——”

“But if Lord Ibbs does not give it you?”

“At least I shall be quit of my college charges then, and able to buy you gowns and necklaces.”

“Oh, Con, dearest.”

The girl laughed pityingly, almost tenderly, so far off and futile did his schemes appear. He clung to the tenderness, did not discern the pity, and went on ardently:

“I shall love to think that the taffetas—this petticoat is taffetas, isn’t it, June?—which wraps you comes from me, and that my pearls are where my kisses should be. And then, and then—— Oh, do you love me?”

“I believe I do.”

She looked at him with persistence.

“Do you wear my ring? How sweetly this stern blue habit with the manly brass buttons fits you. You look so tall in it—like a reed. I remember when I used to think you quite a little child.”

She laughed softly. His flattery was delicious.

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"Look, I am tall," she said, springing from the cart, and standing before him.

He threw his arm round her from behind, and his right hand lifted her face backwards. She tried to free herself.

"This is how you used to stand with me at Heughside, and I could just see your face looking back and upward to me. June, darling, how cold your hands are still, and my head and my limbs are burning; but your breast is warm. Is my ring there?"

"I—don't know."

She clutched the throat of her gown.

"Let me find it."

"Oh, it is safe; the ring is on a chain."

His fingers groped.

"I wish to see it," he whispered. "Why may I not touch you—I, your husband, who would kiss every inch of you, and whom you starve?"

"Oh! it is not true. I do love you indeed."

"Then kiss me."

It was very still in the orchard as the mist wraiths swept by. June closed her eyes and yielded. She was exhausted. Thought and will deserted her for some seconds. She had once looked forward to such a moment as this as the height of all earthly glory, the crown of love. She had expected a deep calm joy in it. Instead, there was a fierce delirium which preceded fear. She began to shiver again.

"Let me go," she whispered back piteously. "It is true I shall be missed. Con, Con, I am afraid."

There was no answer, but he bent his head again to her lips.

"Con, let me go; I am giddy."

He lifted her into the cart, and bent over her.

"June, June, I cannot let you go; I will carry you away now. I have but scarcely drawn you close to me ere you put me off with vague terrors."

"They are not vague. I do not wish——"

She battled for words, not knowing whether this were joy or sorrow. Ten thousand forces seemed to be pulling at her heart-strings, and his arms were strong. Blind, chaotic, torn between flesh and spirit, her will proved conqueror. While he murmured nonsense, played with her hair, her fingers, her face, she took advantage of his loosened hold and sprang to the ground, and in the recoil fell back against the wall of the shed, clinging with one arm to the shelf that ran round it.

He stood speechless, like a man who wakes after intoxication. Her eye searched his. So the woman in her and the man in him held silent converse. The eyes speak more plainly than the lips at great psychological moments. In one face there was inquiry, in the other there was answer. June gave a deep sobbing sigh at last, and folded her hands, dropping her eyes. She could stand that no longer. All the shame in the world enveloped her.

"June," he said brokenly, "June, I am not a Turk or a dragon, that you should fear me so."

"But I do fear you; I fear everything," she cried piteously.

He grew very courageous again.

"And I am here to teach you not to fear; so—in my arms."

"No; let me speak. Do you remember when, as children, we used to drop hazel switches into the river in flood-time? Do you remember how they rushed down the tide, and how we looked for them miles below, after the flood was spent? But we never found them."

"Why do you remind me now?"

"Con, so do I feel now, drowned and stupid."

"If you loved me—— Oh! what is the good of argument? See, I have waited for you. I have a right to claim you when I choose. Come now, I will shield you. Come."

"This is not a time to speak of your right," she panted, half bitter, half in dread.

"Must one always be so wise? Look, you can hide your uniform. These good people here will hold their tongues. The cottage is not a bower, June, but the light from it is warm."

"You forget the Castle gates are closed at nine."

"They may close now, if they choose. It does not concern us. A cottage is as good a shelter as all the halls of a king. Oh! June"—he knelt miserably at her feet—"must I always see you by stealth? How long must this famine last? I ask you now to come away with me."

Her answer was so low that he could scarcely hear it.

"I think it would be wrong."

"The wrong is yours. You deny me."

"It is not true."

"You are set in a high place; you can give me only a stolen interview here; you will not let me take you even to the roughest fireside."

"I am afraid."

"And I must watch all through the night——"

"Oh! do not be foolish."

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"To-night, when you could be kind to me, you are as hard as flint. The precious minutes fly, yet I cannot even bring warmth in your hands. Before heaven I did not mean to frighten you. I did not know what I said. You know in your heart of hearts that you are the victor and I the conquered. You are in the light, I in the darkness. You are content, I the one that goes hungry. And when I wish to protect you——"

"Oh, let me tell you——"

"You flung my powerlessness in my face. I love you, and you shrink from me as if I were the Great Mogul, while your eyes call me 'brute.' I took you by storm but a month ago, and our vows bind us, but not red-hot pincers, it seems, will win you to gentleness. Here I kneel an outcast. What is this strange barrier between us? It is nothing but your own flinty will. Look, I am here close to you. I ask for you."

Fatigue, excitement, despair would have moved an older woman to tears. June choked hers back, and spoke low and deliberately.

"Just now you were mad, Conway. I am not sure that you are not mad still, and I believe that if I do not go away now, I too shall be mad. Madness makes people cruel. You have hurt me again and again to-night. I need your strength, not these blind huggings and ravings that lead us nowhere. You have challenged me many times and made it very hard for me, a girl all confused and distressed, to know how to answer you. I will answer your challenge with another. Write to Lord Ibbs to-morrow and tell him everything, and if proof be needed, there is my ring with your name in it, which I will send you if you desire it. Does that meet your wishes?"

She looked at him steadily, and he did not return the look.

"Lord Ibbs must not know yet," he said quickly—"not till May, when I take my degree. I cannot face him now. There is a card debt which has made him angry. I thought I could win it back, but it landed me deeper in the mud than ever. I did not want to burden you with the story. I wrote to his steward at last, asking him to sound my guardian on the matter. But the steward is a clumsy fellow who cannot disguise a farthing, and it put his lordship in such a passion that he nearly had apoplexy. I have heard from him since that I must pay the debt myself, or that he will make Charlie Wrench—the steward's son—co-heir with me. It would be the division of a cherry if he did that—drat him."

"Oh, Con, Con, what a child you are!"

The danger of the moment averted, she could almost laugh

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at the boy's simplicity ; but all the while she wished that he showed to better advantage in the affair. Her heart sickened as she realised how woefully correct was the impression of weakness which his ravings had made upon her. That hardened her once more, and she spoke almost roughly.

"Get up, Con. If you wish to kiss me, do it now, for I must go."

He obeyed, and let her pass at last. Half-way up the slope she paused, relenting, to look back. He was beside her in an instant.

"In one moment these arms can carry you there, into the light and warmth."

He pointed to the glimmering lattice.

"But they will not do it," she answered slowly, and then took to her heels ; yet the tears were running down her face now, for victory is not always sweet.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SELF-FLAGELLATION, AND A TURN OF THE WHEEL

To have no tribunal but your own fearful heart, to cast about you wildly for some guiding clue of ready-made experience and to find none, is to stand utterly confounded.

So soon as the palpitation of hurried flight from the orchard had left her, and when June sat once more in her closet, with the door locked fast, as if to shut out a decision that she knew but to be momentarily postponed, she did what every woman does after a delirium. Having no previous experience in adventure, she dragged her heart before a court of ghostly judges, and she called up her accusers first. This is characteristic of the Cherier blood. It has always preferred to drag an enemy, lurking in the scrub, out into the open, so as to engage him squarely, and give every skulker fair play. Now June knew nothing of the spirit that animated the Border warfare and highway scuffles of her grandfathers ; but it is certain that the men and women whose love and hot youth, manly and womanly endurance, sins and virtues, meanness and largeness, had gone to her bones and brains, had given her an ardour for fair encounter, which met ice-cold criticism half-way, even though the shock took away her breath. So she brought forth all her spiritual accusers, calling them by their right names as she peered into the blackness of the trees through which the mole-catcher's light glimmered.

Close by her they stood, these hard plaintiffs—fear of the unknown mocking her, pride grinning from ear to ear, selfishness clamouring for first place; but Ambition, a head and shoulders taller than the rest, was spokesman: "You have tasted nonentity, and you did not like it. Poverty grazed you very close, and you shivered. In that hour I bore you up. Love you do not understand. The time is not yet. To-night you see me in Love's place. I yield my place to no man." Then Fear took the vacant place. "You are a child," it hummed, "and you set me up as a spectre, me and my stupid bed-fellow, Caution, who is always drunk with conceit. When you feared me to-night I laughed till that magnificent love-chamber of yours, the shed, echoed again. Of what are you afraid, child, you who know nothing of soul or body? Love found you timorous; I triumph." Pride also stepped forward: "You have set me, too, before Love, and since you live in a king's house, and go well-clothed and smoothly pillowed——"

But June's soul had braved enough, and she cried out for her defence. Slowly they came, these counter witnesses, and when June's soul had ended its confession, Pity mounted the tribunal and took the chief place; and her heart knew that though she went to the tryst full of ambition and pride in her new life, and terror in the thought of letting it go for any other more confined, she had encountered another danger, and one none the less real in that neither church nor society could have belaboured her had she yielded to the will of another.

Her tribunal, it is true, brought her, in the end, very little except a weary confusion, in which her only refuge was a blind self-cudgelling. That, at heart, was something which she could do actively, rhythmically.

I think that Pity, the great soother of these stripes of the heart, must smile very often when a woman beats herself as June did this night. Such penance is a waste of previous argument, and also causes Pity a great expenditure of his precious balsams; for, as fast as he seeks to hush, and soothe, and staunch, the woman—it is always a woman who makes the blindest reparation—brings the stick down on her quivering shoulders.

Her own blows fell like thunder-drops as June crouched in her turret window, gazing at the light in the trees till it went out. And then, having lost her beacon, she put out her arms to it and spoke low like a suppliant, and the thoughts that

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were scarcely born on her lips before they died in the stillness, were after this wise :—

“Boy, I cannot truly tell whether I love you ; but most surely I know that you are of the kind that women do love. Do you the thing that is brave, and I too will do my part. I hold out my arms to you ; yet, as I stand, I know I love you only for pity’s sake, and for your youth and mine. While you lie there in a humble place, thinking hardness and cruelty of me, I cannot sleep for the thought that I have hurt you ; but I am held back from you by hands stronger than yours that draw me. And all that I may do is to suffer for you and because of you. I would heal any wounds of yours with my lips, I would go barefoot to make your road the easier. Ask it of me, and I will give it. To-morrow, to-morrow I will tell you——”

And so with mute speeches that only her own brain heard, and with strange, sad fantasies of such a kind as this, June stretched out her arms to the miserable roof in the darkness till the chill of the night sent her sick and shivering to her couch.

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The overflowing reparation for which the girl yearned was not, however, to be her satisfaction. She slept dreamlessly, and started to find Madame La Fite fully dressed and pinching her cheek, and the cup of breakfast chocolate cold by her side.

“*Eh, bien !* the Beckersdorff’s party last night must have been a very merry one to keep you in bed so long. Thank me, *petite rose blanche*, for saving you from her sacrilegious hand. Your little maid, Meg, came to us to say she could not wake you to give you the Queen’s orders. The Becky was enchanted. She detests you, because you have the air of romance. She gulped down her coffee—what wallet mouths these people have !—and she said : ‘ I will go self and vake her. Young girls do not shleef ven de sun she shine.’ It is lucky for you, *ma charmante*, that at that moment Castano entered with some toasted buns, made after the Queen’s prescription. *La Becky les adore, ces gâteaux*—so I told her to remain, and I would go and warn you. You should have seen her face, divided between jealousy of my authority and infatuation for the *pâté* ! But I am nimbler than she, for I do not eat puffy cakes ; so I left Becky to her debauch.”

“What is it ? When am I wanted ?”

“At once. The Queen goes to Kew, and you with her, and the German.”

“How soon ?”

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June was wondering if a message could reach the mole-catcher's cottage.

"One hour only. You are putting your stockings on inside out. I will send your little maid. A coach for you and the Becky will be ready in an hour. Mind you say 'Yes' to everything, and lead her to talk of her dyspepsia, and then she will be quite supportable."

The little lady caressed the girl, and floated out in a cloud of peeping vanities and half-suppressed sarcasms.

Her semi-ironical tenderness was the tempering of the wind to June, whose conscience was still smarting from the conflict of the night, and in whose ears there rang ever her lover's piteous if theatrical cry: "You in the light, I in the darkness." She was all afire to make atonement, but less eager for explanation than for blind suffering, which should restore Conway's pride in himself and his faith in her. Yet here—this very morning—she was once more set at a sad disadvantage, her heart crying out all the while, lest it should be wholly misunderstood by the lover who seemed to depend on her and to cling to her. She bethought herself of a letter; but her fingers were trembling, and twice she ruined the paper with a flood of blots, while Meg rummaged the room and troubled her with fretsome queries about laces, and loops, and buckles. It seemed but a moment ere she heard the German's voice calling to her, and she could merely scrawl:

"We go to Kew. I gather we shall be there for Christmas, but do not know. I will write."

She turned to give the note to Meg; but the maid had gone, and so she stuffed it into her muff.

Madame Beckersdorff bulged and made herself monstrously large in the coach, squeezing June to one side, so that her fresh, warm breath dimmed the glass of the window.

Now Conway, who, in spite of the mole-catcher's chaff mattress, had slept soundly and with the just satisfaction of an aggrieved and flouted personage, had nursed his woes still more successfully over a steak at the best inn in Old Windsor. At this hour he was standing at its portal cogitating, regardless of all consequences to himself or his lady, a stratagem by which he could bring her to him, set her on his steed, and carry her away. Whither? He pictured her as sweetly smuggled into his room at Oxford, and saw just how her cloak would look thrown across his books. His fancy warmed to white heat, till he forgot his flouting and cursed his empty pockets. She was all but forgiven, and he once more the petitioning gallant

and not the avenging robber on a grey mare. While he cogitated there was a stir in the street. With four scarlet postilions and two outriders came the Queen's carriage. Conway doffed his cap. Then followed a small troop of horse and three Court coaches.

Madame Beckersdorff suddenly found her coach (the last of the procession) oppressive; but, since she could not bear the air on her own cheek, she commanded June to let down her window. So the chances of the day contrived that June's hand was at the window, and her face looked through it at the very instant at which her boy husband stood, cap in hand, gazing after the Queen's carriage. In a moment she had slipped the note from her muff, and, seeing that it fell at his feet, sank back into her corner, glad at least that her own hand had softened its curtness.

CHAPTER XXV

CONWAY DORREN CONSOLES HIMSELF

THE slip of paper worked Master Conway once more into a proper indignation. This was a premeditated thing, he told himself. Not a word of this journey to Kew had slipped from June yesterday. She was surely growing very deep and full of artifice. Was there something behind all this affair of her being at Court? She withdrew as if into a fastness and looked upon him with authority; she ordered her goings and comings, and kept pace with the great and the mighty. It was entirely out of accord with his daydreams and his views of womankind. He whittled a stick as he raged, and argued from his own standpoint in a dogged spirit after this strain: Women were for men, to their mutual glory, and this sudden assumption of estate and independence on the lady's part was an insufferable freak. Besides, she was a paid servant—she, the Lady Ibbs of the future! That, at least, he could not allow. He, a lover and a lord-to-be, checked and brought to book by his lady? It was a slur on his chivalric purpose. Did she think he was like a fish, cold and bloodless, or a patient fool that could be kept dangling at the end of her fan ribbon?

He stamped up and down the cobbles of the yard behind the King's Head, furious and full of disdain of the mere coin which he did not possess, and which would have helped him to smooth life and show himself as a fine, masterful fellow. At his twentieth turn, there clattered in a horseman, whose

beast, turning sharply into the yard, nearly kicked Conway as it slid on slippery stones.

"Who the devil are you, sir?" the boy burst out angrily. "Do you not know, sir, that a horseman who possesses good manners rides in as quietly as he should ride out with noise?"

The answering laugh and voice were familiar. The rider had dismounted and looked round from the left of his horse's neck. Conway recognised the pallid face of Edward Frewin.

"You might give me credit for better manners than my hired hack," said the secretary, as he put out his hand with a cool smile.

Conway's dismay was now his uppermost sensation. This encounter crowned his dejection and anger; but something warned him that it would be wiser to make a show of friendship, and accordingly he clasped Mr. Frewin's hand.

"Well met," said the latter. "You young dogs at Oxford get plenty of leisure, it seems."

"Yes. 'Tis a pleasant life."

Conway swaggered his best.

"You are perhaps here on the same errand as myself?"

"And what is that?"

"To comfort the poor young lady, Mr. Cherier's daughter."

"I have come to pay my respects to Miss Cherier, certainly, sir; but what the devil does it concern you?"

"Now, Dorren, I mean no offence. I wish my task were as pleasant as yours."

"You had better be plain, I think."

"I mean that the squire left London last night with her ladyship, and took the packet with all secrecy to Boulogne. It was barely in time—there were bailiffs on his track. The poor gentleman was for shooting them, and he swore so loud as we rowed from Wapping Stairs to where the packet was moored that I thought he would be trapped even there. There was a fellow lurking on the way whose face I did not like. However, it is over—and I have come here to June——"

"Miss Cherier, sir."

Mr. Frewin's smile was concentrated hatred.

"To give her her father's love and blessing, and some letters."

"I fear you have come too late. Miss Cherier is gone to Kew with the Queen. If you give me the letters, I will ride after her."

"Mr. Cherier desired me, sir, with my own hand——"

"But I tell you I will go instead."

"Pardon me, Dorren; I have her father's orders."

"I don't care for ten thousand fathers."

At sound of the squabble the host came running up.

"Sirs, I beg of you not to brawl here. It is a holiday, and the town is idle and full of loungers. Sirs, be kind."

"Mr. Frewin, you are free to ride while you wish. I have no desire to pick a foolish quarrel."

"Mr. Dorren, I'll race you to Kew, if you choose," bowed the secretary.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said the host.

"I am thirsty," said Mr. Frewin, "my young friend here will doubtless also——"

"Thanks, I'll not drink with you, sir."

Conway strode off to the stables.

"A fair start, Dorren," cried the secretary sharply after him.

"I go to look to my girths," returned the other in the same tone, while Mr. Frewin strolled into the inn.

All heaven seemed to have leagued itself against this impassioned and headlong youth. One glance at his mare told him so. He cursed his fate, and cursed the secretary—and flung out to the bar calling the host. He must have another horse at once. The host said that he had tried to hire one that morning for a guest, but that there was not one in the place, for the staghounds had met early, and everything on four legs had been requisitioned long since by the townsfolk. So the lad fumed and raged, and for lack of better occupation entered the inn parlour to take counsel with himself. Here he scowled again to see the secretary, who was in talk with a tall fair-haired gentleman with a brigandish air, wearing a hat like a steeple. And their talk was of masques, and comedies, and the green room. Presently the stranger left the room and Mr. Frewin, resuming his old sardonic politeness, asked if Conway had not recognised his friend.

"That," volunteered the man of Mayfair, "is Mr. Joyce, a great comedian, and he is taking his company to Bath."

"Any one can see he is a walking Momus," said Conway, interested in spite of his anger.

"He has just been telling me the success of a new pasquinade, called 'Jenkinson's Sack,' which he has converted for the theatre and in which he himself plays the Premier's part, and makes that hooked nose of his a fine podge with his pastes and cosmetics. It has been forbidden in London, which has put Mr. Joyce in a fine state of delight. You must talk with him—a whimsical, odd fellow, whose jests sometimes burn. But I forgot, you are in a hurry."

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"My devil of a pony is lame," growled the boy.

"Now, what a pity!" said the other, with the geniality that the successful man can so well afford. "We will at any rate all dine together. You shall meet also the grand and lovely Mrs. Flowerdew, who, I find, is of the party, and after dinner you could journey with them—*cortège*, vans, wigs, and all—for they go to Oxford to outrun the Lord Chancellor and play 'Jenkinson' as often as they dare before they take to the Bath road again."

"But in any case I must have a horse," said Conway shortly, "for I must ride after dinner."

"No man should ride after dinner," interposed the brigandish gentleman as he came in. "Come, come, let us have a jolly supper together, gentlemen."

"And what are your wishes, sir?" said the host, on the threshold. "I've stewed duck, and toad-in-the-hole, and apple Charlotte, and an orange pudding—the late Mrs. Delaney's special receipt, as given to Her Majesty," he added pompously.

"An orange pudding, a Charlotte, a toad-in-the-hole!" cried a feminine voice. "Oh, gentlemen, how material! What names we English call our food! Toad-in-the-hole, pudding hotch-potch! Oh! sirs, it wounds one's ears. No; if you give me a rare soup, call it '*soupe marquise*,' and even if it be only a medley of roots and broth, let it at least be entitled '*potage bonne femme*' in your catalogue, for virtue, sirs, though you suspect my poor sex so cruelly, is a far commoner thing than you imagine," and she turned her languorous eyes on Conway, who bowed and smiled. "You, Mr. Joyce," she said, holding up a reproachful finger at her manager, "you—who promised me a comfortable rest and good cheer—I wish you were buried in damp goose-down for twenty-four hours. Never have I met with such a lumpy mattress of flock set in such a draughty hole as the couch and the chamber allotted to me. As for the draught, I might as well play Cordelia in the storm, as repose within those flowery panels, gentlemen."

She sighed in self-pity.

Conway dashed into the breach with a compliment, pleased at outstripping the secretary.

"The wind is a rude thing, madam, and dares to do what neither servant nor lover would venture upon in disturbing the slumbers of beauty."

"Fie, fie! sir," laughed the lady, blushing delightfully.

"Nay, I did not mean any personalities," cried Conway, in a youthful embarrassment lest he should have implicated the lady.

"My young friend," murmured the secretary in his ear, "you spoil all by explaining. A man of the world says his mind, and leaves his meanings to take care of themselves."

"Worse and worse," laughed the lady, putting up her fan. "Nay, sir"—she curtsied to Conway—"I vow you are as refreshing as the dew. I wish you had been the apothecary to whom I went for my faceache, to Cheapside yesterday, instead of the snuffy, wheezy villain who nearly tore my jaw to pieces in extricating a piece of bone. Lord! the agony of it. Mr. Joyce, you can tell Miss Spanish she can play Lady Betty, and Lucy, and Mrs. Jenkinson for the present, for I'll not risk my reputation among the young academics at Oxford by appearing with a cheek of extra size. There's no one who knows a woman's points better than those gownsmen, believe me, sir."

"Mr. Dorren here will certainly support your statement, madam," returned the secretary, "for he is himself a student of renown."

At that the comedian and the lady fell upon Conway, and plied him with questions. He was soon the centre of a noisy and genial group, for the rest of the troupe strolled in. Mr. Frewin looked on with a faint chuckle, for he saw his way clear.

At dinner Conway sat between Mrs. Flowerdew, whom he now knew for the same adorable creature he had seen playing at the Haymarket, and Miss Spanish, a fair damsel, who laughed more than she spoke. They kept him busy, while Mr. Joyce saw that all glasses were full. They chattered everlastingly of comedies, Mrs. Flowerdew crying out for something new, a piece that should make a sensation in place of the old ones. Conway, glad to do a good turn to Maudeslay, of Christ's, spoke of his friend's hitherto unacknowledged genius as a playwright, and wished Mrs. Flowerdew to crown it by her art.

"But you too shall write me a comedy, sir," she answered, "for I am sure that your pen is as ready as your tongue. Have you never tried? Ah! I believe you have. Come, I will test you. Rhyme me something now as a pledge of friendship and a love of the arts."

He protested and she insisted; he entreated and she pouted. He asked her pity for the mind-blankness which came upon him at the suddenness of her request; and she loudly resolved to weep for the pain of her face if he did not please to obey her instantly. So what could he do but retire

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to a shelf where an ink-pot stood, and, catching up a pen, scrawl as best he could on the blank scrap of paper he had torn from the back of June's note :—

TO MY MISTRESS'S DENTIST.

Thou Marauder, have a care,
Lurking in thy noisome lair !
Usurer thou, from her that ravished
Many a pearl that heaven lavished !
Ugh ! thou Jew ! thou pinch ! thou screw !
I would play at King John too.
Take thy gold and steel thine heart ;
Curses on thy horrid art !

Placing this effusion before the lady, he fled from the room for shyness, as if his very soul, naked and quivering, had been pinned to the paper. Once more in the cool of the inn yard his head began to lose the fumes of wine a little. He saw that the stable clock pointed to four. To Kew it was ten miles. It would be dark ere he could reach it on foot, and he must be in Oxford by ten. He cursed the secretary and his friends, and his own politeness in not starting sooner. And yet perhaps, after all, it were wisest to follow fate and not risk a commotion with his tutor and a fresh reprimand from Lord Ibbs. These merry people were going to Oxford. Mrs. Flowerdew had offered him a seat in her coach. He asked nothing better than a journey in such excellent company, and duty surely led him for once in this, the easiest way.

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The cavalcade was under weigh within half an hour, and a strange affair it was. Mrs. Flowerdew's chaise departed last of all, amid the giggles of Miss Spanish, who protested that Mr. Dorren's legs were so long that he must really sit with them hanging out of the window. There was, moreover, added to the din the voice of Mr. Joyce, whose "King John, ha ! King John, too, and 'screw' too ; ha ! a monstrous but compelling rhyme"—and the accent—"King John, too," rang flatteringly in Conway's ears.

When the chaise had disappeared beyond the turnpike, where the road curved, Mr. Frewin, laughing softly, called for his brown cob, and took the road to Kew.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SECRETARY TEMPTS

MR. FREWIN rode steadily, and the sun was slowly setting in river mist as he was ushered into the low parlour of the stucco wing of her Majesty's palace at Kew. June did not keep him waiting, for she scented news, or danger, or both. She did, however, give herself time to school her face into passivity. She curtsied to him in her stateliest manner, smothered a yawn as she complained that the days were monstrous dull, and asked almost flippantly for news of Lady Mildred.

"That I cannot tell you," said he; "but I'll wager her ladyship is in a woful plight on the sea between this and Boulogne."

June could have struck him for the clumsy abruptness with which he brought her the news that was the aim of his journey, and he had the grace to be sorry when he saw how her hands clasped and unclasped each other under her embroidered apron, as she sat by the table and tried to listen to all that there was to say about her father's danger, his escape, and self-exile. Yet she scarcely heard it, for she was but conscious of a gigantic desolateness, greater than any she had ever known. The lodging in Soho that she had despised seemed to her now to have been a home full of gay innocence and warm love. Now even this last refuge was gone from her.

"I will write," she faltered at last, between tears.

But to write yet was impossible, for not even to Mr. Frewin had the address been confided, for fear of discovery and annoyance.

"You will permit me to serve you, sometimes," he said.

She threw him a hurried, suspicious glance.

"My work is here, Mr. Frewin," she said. "I trust I may need no champion."

"With me and our young friend, Dorren," he said, "you have at least two devoted slaves at your back."

He grinned significantly.

"Mr. Dorren has his studies, and you will be away in Mayfair, I fear," she retorted. "Pray do not concern yourself on my behalf."

"I do not mean that you require either of us to shed our heart's blood as knight-errants," he replied proudly, "though Dorren was greatly desirous of shedding mine a few hours ago, because I would not relinquish Mr. Cherier's

letter to him. But should you require relief from the tedium of Royal service, or any business transacted, you will, I trust, call upon me." He looked round the room, and out at the misty, silent gardens in which the pagodas and heavy summer-houses nestled in grey solitude. "Ah! 'tis a snuff-brown Court her Majesty keeps—a snuff-brown Court." He shook his head, sighing. "You are buried here, you who should be in the brightest place of the brightest social firmament."

"And here I am likely to stay," she retorted, "since I am my own mistress, and have now my own purse."

She tossed her head.

"The favour of the great is not easy to retain," he said coolly. "What if the Queen proves changeable, and you are superseded, June?"

"Except where scandal steps in," she answered, while her heart began to beat in spite of all her scorn of his warning, "there are but two sources of dismissal here. They, Mr. Frewin, are death and marriage." She fixed her eyes with an effort on his face, and braved a fib in sheer anger at his use of her name. "I pray Heaven will keep me as far from the first as I stand from the second."

"If that be indeed your prayer," he replied grimly, "there is nothing left but to echo it on your behalf. But life holds other things than marriage for the venturesome and the courageous. In your place I would not tarry to exchange the blue and scarlet of Windsor for the buff and blue of Carlton House, and that with the more pleasure, seeing that, since to Carlton House Mr. Cherier owes his bankruptcy, from Carlton House should come your restitution. Oh! 'tis a snuff-brown Court this, believe me."

She could have struck him with her open hand.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

A FENCING MATCH

QUEEN CHARLOTTE stood with her back to the window. She held a paper in her mittened hands and struck it angrily as she spoke.

"This is absurd. It is worse than absurd—it is impertinent!" Mr. Frewin bowed. "Impertinent! Do you understand?"

The glances of the little thin woman darted at the courtier like the tongues of snakes.

"What answer must I take back, madam?"

"Tell my son the Regent that there is no answer."

"Then your Majesty is graciously pleased to approve of the suggested arrangement?"

"I disapprove of everything."

"Has your Majesty any proposal to make?"

"None whatsoever."

"May I venture to remind your Majesty that some settlement of the claims upon his Royal Highness is absolutely indispensable? Already the news of these Spanish bonds has leaked out. Their Royal Highnesses, and especially Prince Ernest, are at the moment excessively unpopular. To ask for a Parliamentary grant is scarcely advisable. This, however, will be necessary."

"It is impossible. I deny my son's right to it. There are other leakages already. I am in treaty with Lord Moira and Lord Eldon on my own affairs."

"Your Majesty is therefore in a position to defray a portion of the great expenses entailed by the coming State festivities."

"I am not accustomed to discuss my private finances, sir, with any Jack or John through whom my son thinks fit to transact his disagreeable business."

The secretary bowed again.

"I have other business," began the Queen, who had turned her back upon him and fidgeted at her bureau.

"Unhappily I am forced to ask your Majesty for a definite reply. The Prince of Wales will only ascribe a verbal answer to my clumsiness, madam."

The Queen sat down at her bureau, and turned impatiently.

"If you can tell me what my son expects, Mr. Frewin, I will inform you how far he may expect to be disappointed."

Mr. Frewin bowed, and opened the roll of paper which had slipped on to the floor.

"The items—if your Majesty will permit me to be exact—are: £10,000 for the new decoration of Carlton House; £2,000 for the Princess Charlotte's outfit on her *début*; £5,000 due to his Royal Highness from your——"

"Due?" she scoffed. "There is nothing due—except debts and dishonoured bills."

"Your Majesty promised——"

"I promise nothing. I will have no claims in this off-hand fashion."

"Then it will be best for Lord Eldon to meet the Prince."

"It will be useless."

"The Regency Act will remind you, madam, that his Royal Highness stands, of course, in the position of his father with regard to Parliament. I——"

The Queen started up and faced him.

"You, Mr. Frewin, may go back and tell my son that, if he moves in this matter without my written consent, I revoke the arrangement entered into concerning the Princess of Wales. My letter to her Royal Highness, requesting her to absent herself from the Drawing-rooms this season, lies here under my hand. If the Regent refuses to consult my wishes with regard to a Parliamentary grant for his private pocket, I will no longer share the odium I incur in the eyes of the public by ignoring the position of his wife."

"Then your Majesty may perhaps suggest some private source of income for extricating his Royal Highness from immediate embarrassment."

The Queen smiled satirically.

"The Prince of Wales has many friends."

Mr. Frewin cleared his throat.

"His Royal Highness has too much regard for his friends——"

"To cripple them further? I can well understand it."

"It is therefore natural that his Royal Highness should appeal to your Majesty."

The Queen raised her voice.

"It is impossible. The Regent may see my ledgers, if he wishes to prove it."

"Unfortunately"—the secretary bowed more proudly than before—"unfortunately the Prince of Wales bases his

expectations on some facts which have probably escaped your Majesty's memory. The income from the sale of certain cadetships for the East Indies allows your Majesty a margin which may admit of lending his Royal Highness timely assistance.

The Queen advanced a step, putting both hands to the brooch that pinned her kerchief at her throat. Her hands were trembling. They could not loosen the pin. Her breath came in gasps. The reddish-purple colour, that her maids of honour dreaded to see, spread itself over her face to the roots of her white hair.

"Has my secretary been to Carlton House?"

"No, madam."

"The Prince is mistaken."

"Then your Majesty must, of course, take instant steps to crush a report, which at any moment may be circulated in this matter."

"What? Who dares?"

"Your Majesty wishes further explanation?"

She nodded irritably. Her hands went up to her throat again.

"The matter lies thus. The figures—I beg you, madam, to remember that I give the numbers roughly—the figures representing your Majesty's annual income from these cadetships amount to £20,000. A trifling sum, yet not one to be thrown away. The case of Mrs. Clark is a sore point in military circles. This is scarcely the moment to remind your Majesty's subjects——"

"It is absolutely false."

"Then your Majesty has only to prove that the sum named finds its way into the public coffers."

The Queen laughed.

"That is a simple affair."

"Then you will graciously sign this, madam?"

"I will sign nothing."

"I must inform your Majesty that the whole matter will otherwise be dragged into the press. I have letters from a gentleman in Germany warning me of this. Private reports are already in circulation."

"These threats of my son the Regent have no effect upon me, Mr. Frewin."

"Let me entreat your Majesty to reflect. Here is a signed statement on the part of one whose name your Majesty will find in your banking account. The name is Oldfield; the date

January; the sum £500. There was a long correspondence. It is all, doubtless, madam, in your secretary's possession. This gentleman—Lieutenant Oldfield—made the statement you here see to my correspondent in Hamburg. A private printing-press can turn out several hundred copies before another sun sets. It is necessary to decide now whether your Majesty thinks it worth while to incur such a risk as the publication of these details."

There was dead silence for the space of a minute as the Queen paced to and fro between the door and window, opening and shutting her small grey fan.

"How much does this creature in Hamburg want, to hold his tongue?" she asked, as she turned abruptly.

"Five thousand."

"And the security?"

"This second statement denying that of Oldfield."

She went to her bureau and took out a roll of notes, which she put into his hand.

"Count them," she snapped.

"They are correct. Your Majesty will graciously sign this draft for his Royal Highness?"

"No, no. This is too much."

"Then I must respectfully refuse the notes for my friend, madam."

Once more they faced. She breathed harder now. His visage was a blank mask. Suddenly she threw up her hands with a little gasp of despair. Then, with head erect, she moved once again to the escritoire, snatched a pen, and signed her name in the spot to which he pointed.

"His Royal Highness instructed me to ask your Majesty's views in respect to a different matter."

"Go on."

"He wishes to know whether the suggestion made by him about Miss Cherier suits your Majesty."

"I cannot see any reason for hurrying the matter. The girl is useful to me. There is no call for her at Warwick House. The more the Princess Charlotte is encouraged in the idea that she is to be surrounded by a bevy of ladies-in-waiting and a little Court of her own, the harder it will be to arrange the terms of her marriage with the Prince of Orange. She has had too much freedom already. It was a fatal mistake to let her go to Warwick House. She should be here—with me."

"The Prince of Wales is fully aware of this risk of isolating her Royal Highness, but he is of opinion that Miss Cherier's

instalment will give the clue to the present insubordination of the Princess Charlotte, who has, more than once, expressed a wish to have her companionship."

"Miss Cherier is too young and ignorant to be mixed up in any schemes, Mr. Frewin."

"In that lies the safeguard. When does your Majesty think it will be best to transfer Miss Cherier to London?"

"This is entirely out of keeping with my plans, and annoys me exceedingly," she grumbled.

"The date for the arrival of the Allied Sovereigns is fixed for June 8th."

"I shall go to Buckingham House a week earlier."

"By that time your Majesty will have dispensed——"

"I shall dispense with nothing until I choose. This affair must stand over. Miss Cherier is necessary to me during the first days of my arrival. Has she friends with whom she can stay?"

"Her cousin, Lady Curragh, in Half Moon Street, madam."

"Well, it will do. It can be arranged later."

"Your Majesty does not require me further?"

For answer she rose and placed herself between the secretary and the door that led into the vestibule.

"What is my security for *this*?" she said fiercely, her rage returning as she watched him fold up the notes she had given him.

He tendered her the manuscript statement.

"This is no proof that the man Oldfield will keep silence."

"Your Majesty is absolutely protected. The lieutenant, poor fellow, is not likely to trouble your Majesty further, for the good reason that he came to Germany to die of fever, bought in exchange for £500."

She darted forward.

"The vile wretch at Hamburg has, then, no proofs. How dare you—good God!—how dare you?"

"My friend at Hamburg has your Majesty's notes"—he held them up—"and my master, madam, has secured a most satisfactory solution of his difficulties, for which he has to thank your Majesty profoundly."

The door swung behind him. The page who closed it saw, a yard from the threshold, a little woman in a mustard-coloured jacket and a flowing black lustrous petticoat, whose eyes seemed to start out of her head with impotent rage, while her fingers fumbled at her thin neck.

CHAPTER II

OF THE PRINCESS CHARLOTTE OF WALES

FOR a season at least, June knew that there was security for her. She kept her father's letters, which were constant, ever close to her. It gave her a sense of reality and consciousness of purpose, though her aim was flagging for sheer lack of knowledge of life. But she divined at least that fate demanded just then but little more of her than that she should be the piece of putty which was Madame La Fite's image of the perfect courtier; and she grew thrifty, saving out of her spare monthly payments—for the sum of which Madame La Fite spoke had in no sense been definitely forthcoming—all that she could, so that she might grow a pile big enough to send through the post to Boulogne—a forlorn hope enough, but it pleased her who had never known before the value of a florin, and guessed still less what were the hundreds which lay in the Squire's debt-scales against her economies. And so there was little to wound her nearly, and much to interest. It is true that she hungered after action. The knotting of purses, the crayon-drawing, the reading aloud, the countless errands that made a part of her daily life, were no food for young blood. She drew some satisfaction out of the romance between Princess Mary and the Duke of Brunswick, as detailed to her by Madame La Fite, and openly discussed in Madame Beckersdorff's parlour by all of them. Once the Duke actually came to visit the Queen, and June warmed, for he sat his horse well, and had fine, strong soldier's shoulders.

Mrs. Newbery, who might have shed some light on this affair, was, however, away. It was indeed as well, for her Majesty, who, according to Madame La Fite, had grown strangely suspicious, had conveyed through one of her ladies a special request that June should preserve discretion in the invitation of guests, in view of the important situation that might be awarded her at Warwick House should the Princess Charlotte still remain mistress of her own establishment. This intimation had been made at Kew, and followed on the secretary's visit. June's explanation of its cause had sufficed to substitute smiles for censure, but the hawk-like eyes and the prowling propensities of the Beckersdorff put June on her guard. One thing was certain. There must be no meetings by the mole-catcher's cottage at dusk, nor risk of any other direct siege. She almost

blessed the Queen's severity in that it formed one barrier which kept the flood-gates closed.

Edward Frewin's insinuations had filled her with irritability that at times reached cool anger of a somewhat deadly description. She did not need much assistance from him in conjuring up a Conway who certainly could not be put on his old pedestal. Not that she doubted her lover's honour; she merely missed the god-like strength with which he seemed at first attired from head to foot. It is gospel truth that if he had gone astray so far as to forget his marriage oath, she would, at this juncture, have overlooked that more easily than the puling lack of ardour in the use of his brains and opportunities. Here was a man, she argued to herself, a youth one year her senior only, but set on the highway of life, free to come and go, and do and dare, coming and going, yet doing and daring nothing, except the toss of a coin and the snatch of a kiss. She itched to be in his coat and breeches red-hot of purpose from crown to toe. She wore her ring, nevertheless, in its accustomed place, determined that this visible symbol of a compact should be her safeguard. And when a natural irony and helplessness made criticism of him, herself, and the world in general too relentless and acrid, she would shut her eyes and hold the token in her hand till she was humbled and once more ready to endure.

The loneliness of her youth had given her an abnormal power of disguise. Underneath lay fantasy unbounded, like a subterranean lake fed by warm springs. Above, a steady observant attitude, plastic (though she did not know the meaning and value of such a word), accepting without marvelling the things that happened. Letters came from Oxford, piteous and appealing, proud and extravagant in their professions of triumph over obstacles, now full of the hardihood of a man of the world when he faces, not the future, but the searching present—that hardest of *vis-à-vis*—now steeped in a proud despair.

It was in the latter mood that June best liked the letters. At the extravagance, her very soul laughed at him and herself in a manner so hollow that she dreaded breaking the seal of his next packet. But the despair of youth is at least moving, and has its own dignity. So when Conway despaired, June's mother-tenderness was instantly his advocate. She had overthrown his pedestal, we know, but at such moments she could at least draw him in imagination into her arms, and her letters were full of pity and gentleness, while shorter than his,

for she had no heart for fine-blown parables, nor Latin, nor verse, even had she been pedant enough to indulge in them. She told him of the Queen's strictness with respect to her visitors, but so gently that it should not hurt him. It was, however, enough to create an outburst, which she answered curtly, ending that he must not think of her or of anything with his great projects—meaning his examinations—near at hand. Back came a letter of midnight vigils and hard labour for June's sake, which made her flog herself for severity and sententiousness. But the postscript froze her :

"Mr. Joyce, of whom I wrote, has been lodging with me for a week, and is most urgent about the comedy (of which I spoke to you) which I had sketched. He will take it to Mr. Kemble. Judge if I am gleeful, sweetheart. But 'tis hard work when my mind must turn to the Fathers, and the Heroes, and the making of lambics, to leave the fire of Imagination and pulsing emotions of my *persona*. Still I achieve it, and have even found time to sketch a 'Masque of Summer,' in which I will set you as a frozen white Star-Flower."

"If I freeze, it is you who freeze me," she muttered fiercely, as she locked the sheet in her cabinet, and an hour after relented, even to tears.

Purposeless as such extremes of cold and heat might appear, her acquaintance with impotence, indignation, and pity was the ministrant which came to the relief of the daily monotony that kills youth. As in a mirror she beheld the larger struggles of one whose destiny was both great and little, the young girl who might one day be lady paramount of the towers by the river, mistress of the pleasaunce at Kew, and Queen of Britain. Yet the Princess Charlotte scarcely looked the part as yet. When she knelt, white-veiled, at her solitary confirmation, only the emotion of a demonstrative nature, and the earnestness of the moment, gave her distinction above the rest who looked on. Her garb was plain—plainer than that of the daughters of the burghers of Old Windsor—and Mrs. Lewis, her attendant, lamented that her mistress's wardrobe must be content with patchings and turnings which it taxed all the dresser's needlecraft to disguise.

Princess Charlotte's visits set the stagnant waters of the household astir. She was the one creature in whom impulse was suffered. She glowed with impetuosity. Rapid sentences trembled on her lips, but rarely fell from her ; her steps danced with an animation that seemed entirely irritable. She arrived, as it were, by order, and departed as formally as she came ; but during her visits of a week or a fortnight at a time rumours

flew fast through the corridors and the lodges. That august and austere lady, her dragon, Cornelia Knight, said more with her dry coughs and her pursed lips than if she had talked the contents of an entire gazette over the teacups in the evenings.

The Duchess of Leeds, who stayed at the Lower Lodge, wore—poor lady!—a continual wrinkle on her amiable forehead, for she was daily at the Castle, and kept her secretary busy. Sometimes June accompanied the young Princess to the Lodge, and then she felt once more a human being, and less of a machine. Miss Knight thawed towards her, for in so young a creature she saw no rival to herself, and therefore lost no opportunity of giving the girl, in strictest confidence, the whole narrative of her retirement from her Majesty's service, solemnly calling heaven to witness that none of the flattering invitations of the Regent, but only her devotion to the Princess Charlotte, had led her to transfer her services from the Queen to her Majesty's granddaughter.

There were days when an order would reach June to dress and to accompany her Majesty in a stroll, when the Princess Charlotte, too, would be of the group. Walking some paces behind, the girl noted many things—how the young Charlotte, chided by the elder for tripping ahead, would drop humbly to heel, and presently, forgetting herself, would cry out that the double May was in bloom, when she would be told that the flower was not May at all, nor any plant of that nature. At other times June saw how she would stop abruptly, with one of her impetuous half-turns, revelling with a child's glee in the note of a bird, only to be snappishly assured that it was a corncrake, or some such unmusical noise-maker. June wondered at last what alchemy had turned into vinegar the blood of this strange little woman in the high cap and the kerchief crossed on her bosom, and how the one, who had laid many tiny heads to sleep against her shoulder, could remain for ever impenetrable to the maid of eighteen beside her, who babbled of the glory of spring.

During one of these walks in the enclosure known as the "Queen's Garden," letters of importance arrived, and the stroll was necessarily curtailed, while June was sent on in advance with a message. It was scarcely delivered, when she was despatched post-haste for Princess Charlotte. She hunted vainly up and down the shrubberies and in the borders. She began to be almost frightened. As she passed an overhanging hedge of yew a soft voice called her. Crouching in a gap, blanched, large-eyed, was Charlotte, finger on lip.

"Is She there?" she asked.

June shook her head, and put out a gentle hand to assist her.

"I dare not come; I will stay here. I shall die of fright if She sees me."

"Madam, I conjure you to come out. Her Majesty specially sent me to find you."

"Go and say you cannot."

"Madam, you know I cannot."

The two girls' eyes met full—the blue ones and the grey. The breeze caught June's ribbons, and rubbed them into a violent rustling.

"She is coming," said Princess Charlotte, the hunted look coming back into her eyes.

June's spirit rose.

"And if her Majesty comes, madam, what then?"

Princess Charlotte slipped out of her covert, the colour rushing back into her face.

"Your Royal Highness is not—afraid?" said June in the same ringing tone.

"Yes—I am afraid. *We are all afraid.* Directly She has gone the fear returns. When She is here I can bear it; when She is absent I feel that She may come for me or send for me."

She clung piteously to June's hand. The girl, in obedience to an impulse which in a more critical moment she would have condemned as extravagant, sank on her knees.

"Madam, look; I am a girl but two years older than yourself, and I have eyes to see and ears to hear, and I think I know pain, though there are many things I have never learnt, and others of which I do not know the meaning; but this one thing I will not do, I will not fear. And you, who will be Queen of England, you shall not, you can have no fear. See, what a story, what a scandal if, in the years to come, some vile persons painted you as you had crouched and cowered there, not like the Queen of the future, but as the naughty child."

"You are cruel," said the Princess, bursting into tears; "as cruel as the rest."

She flung away.

June rose to her feet, biting her lips. She told herself she was no courtier. But the frankness had taken effect. The Princess turned and held out her hand.

"Come here," she said imperiously. June obeyed. "I like you because you are not like all the rest. Tell me, do you love 'Us'?"

Then she laughed, lowered her voice, and took on one that was an accurate imitation of the Queen's inflection:

"Do you not think dat ve rule de world here? Ve are every one's. America is lost, but ve can do widout America; ve have England, and Vindsor, vich is de centre of England. Dere is no one who says 'No' to Us."

She ended in a fit of hysterical laughter. Then she put her finger on her lip again.

"Come," she said, spreading out her simple grey skirt as if it were a Court mantle, "come; the Merry Wife of Windsor has sent for 'Us.' We will go to her. We will bide our time."

* * * * *

And still rumours flew about the corridors and the lodges. Now it was that the Prince of Orange, who had been for some time pressing his suit, was really and truly to be betrothed to the Heir-Apparent. Again, gentlemen of the Court who brought the latest news from St. James's declared that Princess Charlotte's elderly but Royal cousin, his Grace of Gloucester, had made the running, and that she had actually assured her ladies that if she must be hurried to and fro between her father's house and her grandmother's, and never permitted to see her poor mother, the Princess of Wales, except at rare intervals, she would embrace marriage with any tolerable personage; for then at least she could conduct the affairs of her own household, without being told where to order her carriages and how to choose her tradesmen. As for "tolerable personages" she would prefer an Englishman. Others, who saw the little Princess from many points of view, swore that this obvious penchant for the Duke of Gloucester was all a blind, and invented just to cover some one else. Of love or marriage she never spoke to June, but she would sit in the window of her aunt's room when she could escape, and then she would call to her companion for stories. In the library at Heughside, June had read plenty of clashing, clanging legends, full of stir and vigour, and endurance and love. Such as she could remember she would tell, seated in a low chair facing the window, and as she went on, her imagination, refreshed and flowering, would send out delicate, curling tendrils of fantasy, such as girls love.

They sat thus far into the dusk almost knee to knee, the waiting-woman of twenty and the Princess of eighteen. June's eyes held her listener, for they varied in depth and intensity.

"What colour are your dreams?" whispered the fascinated Princess, leaning forward one night with her hands on June's shoulder.

"I think they must be blue, madam," answered June, her mouth solemn, her deep eyes smiling.

CHAPTER III

AN INCIDENT IN COURT CUSTOM

DURING these periods of attendance on the young Princess Charlotte, the girl-in-waiting surely lived a new life. The greatness for which she had looked had scarcely been lavished on her, it is true; but she found instead a living interest in the individuality of her young mistress. She learnt that one may forget greatness in generous giving, and pride in pure surrender without hope of return. Her reserve before the rest of the household sheltered her from the personal onslaughts of Madame Beckersdorff, who might fume in secret as she chose. It maddened her that June showed neither jealousy nor desire to probe into the secrets of others, that she never solicited anything of the Queen, or troubled to publish any little favour shown her by the Princesses. It is conceivable that Madame Beckersdorff would have rejoiced in the etiquette that forbade the old-established servitors to perturb their minds about girls, chits—in June's position. But it was not so. She grizzled, and was just inventive enough to make matters for grizzling. She was perpetually hurt—"beleidigt" was a word of which her cronies grew quite weary. June was amused at first. Latterly the amusement ended in contempt. She forgot to be watchful, and awoke with amazement to the pettiness of household malice.

In accordance with a custom established in the days of the Electress, it was usual to give the pages a certain dole on Christmas Eve. In each parlour were placed fresh candles in extra sconces. These it was not etiquette to use, and they were removed next morning as the perquisites of the page. A small coin, a dish of apples, and a box of sweetmeats were also given by the ladies and gentlemen to the page in attendance.

Now, Madame Beckersdorff loved fresh candles, and was perpetually complaining at the severe economy practised by the Queen's housekeeper in this direction. The German also delighted in sweetstuff. In a weak moment, when she found herself alone in June's tiny sitting-room, she abstracted the new tapers for private use, replacing them with burnt stumps. Then her eye fell upon a basket of sugared nuts, which she could not resist. She ate them, saving the top layer, made the deficiency good in her own fashion, and went away chuckling softly.

There waited on June a little Spanish lad, the youngest of the pages, a mere child. She liked his lisping speech, his

animated gestures, his soft eyes. He was registered in Colonel Goldsworthy's great ledger as Manuel Tereira Solano, but the ladies had quickly added the diminutive, and "Solanino" ran their errands willingly. June could not understand the tears in his eyes on Christmas morning. "What has happened?" she asked Madame Beckersdorff. The German looked uncomfortable.

Presently a scuffle was heard in the corridor, and the ladies hurried out in time to see the youngest page, as red as a turkey cock, in full fight with one of his bigger comrades. Neither heard the equerry's wrathful orders or the rustle of the Queen's gown; but the older of the combatants saw her at last, and slipping in dismay, sprawled backwards. It was then that Solanino, flushed and triumphant, about to kneel on his opponent's chest, cursed his page's livery and his menial office, as he fell back shamefaced to flatten himself against the wall. The Queen called the German sharply, and returned to her own room. The boys retreated. June was still more puzzled when summoned to the Queen. The Beckersdorff glowered at her from behind her Majesty's chair while Solanino stood miserably in front of it.

"I understand from Madame Beckersdorff," began the Queen, "that you are responsible for the clownish behaviour of these pages."

June looked at her in bewilderment.

"It appears," continued the Queen, clearing her throat, "that you have disregarded our household Christmas customs."

June blushed. She had done what she could, but her purse was low and she could not compete with the French sweetmeats bought by some of the other ladies.

"I will try to repair any mistakes I have made, madam," she said humbly.

"Then you will be good enough to replace the candles burnt."

June faltered her bewilderment.

"Oh, madam!" muttered the page.

"Silence!"

"Oh, madam! it is not the candles, it is the sweets. Some one ate them."

"Miss Cherier, did you eat the page's sweets?"

The girl could not resist a laugh.

"Certainly not, ma'am."

"Solanino, what does this mean?"

"Gregory and Castano and the others laughed at me, because the little basket from mademoiselle contained cough lozenges,

madam. They are the lozenges that Madame Beckersdorff adores," he added, with a gleeful look at the German.

"Somebody must have tampered with my gift, ma'am," said June.

"You can return presently, Madame Beckersdorff." The German disappeared. "Now, Miss Cherier, you are a lady. Did you keep the candles?"

Solanino contained himself no longer. He ran up to within a foot of the Queen, fell on his knees, burst forth with a hotch-potch of Spanish and German.

The Queen listened in grim amusement.

"How do you know who ate the nuts?"

"I was behind the curtain."

"What were you doing there?"

He cast a sly glance at June.

"I was looking at mademoiselle's picture, and I thought I heard her coming, so I hid. I thought she would be angry."

"Go and wait outside."

"Madam will not let the German lady hurt me?"

"You are forgetting yourself; go at once."

He threw a piteous look at June and fled.

"Miss Cherier, you are a lady, and I believe you. I am sorry for this ridiculous suspicion. Madame Beckersdorff is very jealous; but she is a faithful creature. I will see that she does not annoy you in future."

"Thank you, madam. I offered her some nuts, but she would not have them."

"You had better leave her to me. You may go."

She spoke with her back to the girl, but June saw her shoulders heave slightly, and the outline of her cheek curved with something that was not anger.

Solanino, lurking in the corridor, darted up to be forgiven.

"You silly, silly child!"

Tears came into the boy's eyes.

"Never mind; the Queen is laughing."

"Aquesta vinagrera Beckersdorff!"

"Hush! If you are good, I will give you a picture like the one in my room."

"Oh, mademoiselle!"

"Solanino, if you and I were free to go into the wide world, would you come and take care of me?"

"To the death, mademoiselle."

His childish face, his southern fire—she scarcely knew whether to be amused or sorry.

"But we cannot," she said gently.
She touched the scarlet cuff of her sleeve.
"We belong to the Queen, you and I."

* * * * *

And thus the spring had slowly spread to summer. She longed for anything that would make the days race faster. Even a visit from Mr. Frewin would have been preferable to nothing. Her last letter to Oxford remained unanswered. But Mr. Frewin was too busy hanging about the gates of Carlton House for his own ends to trouble about a pale-faced girl. On the Queen's brief visit to London, June was left behind, and sighed her heart out with desire to be in the thick of the fun of Mayfair, scraps of which kind Colonel Goldsworthy would retail when her Majesty returned.

One summer morn he walked in full of news. The Curraghs were in town. He had known Molly Curragh as a girl—the sweetest of girls, and now the sweetest of women. They had bought Lord Cane's house in Half Moon Street, and Lady Curragh wrote to say her prophet's chamber was ready for her cousin. The Queen had been put in high good humour by the declaration of peace, and the imprisonment of the First Consul in Elba, and by an amicable arrangement with her favourite son, the Prince Regent, that he would no longer press his debts in Parliament until she had in some measure received Lord Eldon's written confirmation of a special grant towards her projected almshouses in Datchet.

The Prince of Orange, too, was advancing in the favour of Princess Charlotte. Gossip in the Castle even said that the Duchess of Leeds had her foils ready for a respectful match with her Majesty on the burning subject of the little Princess's trousseau, and that her Majesty's haberdasher from Cheapside would certainly play a stout second to her Grace. Thus the hour was propitious, and when Princess Elizabeth, at Madame La Fite's instigation, declared that Miss Cherier looked pale, and had had no leave from duty for full six months, the Queen, in view of her coming State festivities in London to greet the allied sovereigns of Europe, called the girl to her, signified a stiff but not grudging approval of her discretion and her services, and gave her not only freedom, but an advance of salary.

June cogitated whether she should write to Oxford. No, she would not. Conway should come and find her. It was certainly his duty, and if he did not write, she would not make her letters too cheap, either.

An escort by coach to London was easily provided. Lady

Curragh's glad welcome told June how desolate had been her own state since her Irish visit. She forgot her fears, her secret. The escape from Court routine was indescribable. In her girlhood, her personality had no more mirth in its expression than has the cry of the northern plover. In London she breathed gaiety and basked in it—a veritable Romney lark. The house was always busy—visitors, routs, the play. She liked the visitors best. The entry of one—the mad and amusing Lady Adela Lupton—was always a signal for enjoyment. This genial lady was delighted to be introduced to Molly's cousin, and overwhelmed her with patronage, chattering incessantly and with pride of the kindness of the Princess of Wales, and her woes, and the dinner-parties at Kensington and Blackheath, at which she, Lady Adela, was always a welcome guest. Such graciousness, such informality, she vowed, never were found before in any Royal personage. She questioned June about the young Princess, wept for the unhappy estrangement between the Prince of Wales at Carlton House and the rival household at Kensington, and repeatedly invited June to accompany her on a visit to that most distressful lady, his wife.

CHAPTER IV

MAYFAIR

LADY Curragh's sweet seriousness, her frank wit, her tender watchfulness for the girl's gaiety and comfort, almost thawed June's secret from her ; but the opportunity was ever wanting. When they were alone, June's lips were not in the right shape to frame what she would wish to say. When in debate alone, she answered her conscience with the question : "What will it avail any one if I speak now?" When the necessity for the truth flooded and startled her, it came in a flash during a crowded assembly, or in an hour when frivolities and guests absorbed her hostess. This lightness and gaiety made the truth all the more distasteful. What was done, was done. It did not concern these persons. It was nothing very criminal, after all, and it was not her secret only, nor a proud secret. And so June, who loved not analysis, laid her ghost to sleep under the feast-table, assuring herself that the matter had no concern with the people who came and went in the house in Half Moon Street. Secure in the thought, she set herself to amuse and to be charmed, to taste, to enjoy. She was gluttonous for the brilliancy and the endless diversions of the season. Her cousin Moll christened her the Marchioness Gadabout.

Best of all did the girl love, not the opera or the parks, when the dust choked her sensitive nostrils and the cry of the fruit-women irritated her, but the green shade of Cremorne, where her cousin's tea table drew wits and tattlers in strings as on a fairy's thread. June sat among the teacups, busy in her cousin's assistance, but when her hands were idle there were many ready to talk to her.

One evening there came, leaning on Lord Alvanley's arm, a slight gentleman of noble countenance, and soft brown hair that was undisguised with powder. Despite his excessive youth, he had a look of age and sadness. His neckcloth was tied in an irregular fashion, and his hands were small and very white. He limped painfully. Her ladyship went forward with a little cry of greeting, for she was always tender to crippled things. She turned to Lord Alvanley.

"For this renewal of my friendship with Lord Byron I thank you," she said heartily. "You always bring me wit; to-day you have brought me soul as well."

At which, Alvanley, piqued, said that soul was twin sister to passion, and that if he had been backward as her ladyship's Autolycus, it was only because he did not guess that her fancies lay amongst wares so lurid. He would have bettered this but for a disconcerting drowning roar from Curragh, who, on inquiry, however, was found to be laughing at a quip of the beau on the previous day. Joan Canning, too, was often of this party; Mr. Canning himself was too busy with his coming embassy to Lisbon to have time for frivolity.

June dressed for the ball at Devonshire House that evening with an exciting sense of risk in her present situation. She felt herself recklessly secure, dangerously free. She would make the most of opportunities.

The evening was indeed a fine setting for an audacious mood. Light and colour, dignity and wealth streamed down the splendid stairways. The jewels were so many, and the tapers so cunningly disposed, that there seemed not a shadow anywhere, except under the soft lashes of the beauties and the moustachios of the soldier heroes of the Peninsula and the foreign princes whom Mayfair delighted to honour. The Prince of Orange craved an introduction to Lady Curragh's guest, and June's pride and joy at her own success made her steps as light as foam. He spoke of festivities at Oxford, and June told him all the news at Windsor, and how a certain Princess grew daily in dignity and queenliness—watching the effect of these

incitements mischievously out of the corner of her heavy-lidded eyes. She had not imagined that anything displeasing could have come as an anti-climax to this dazzling moment. It was not in her calculations in those days, but in after times she had closer acquaintance with the rhythmical dashing of sweetness.

At the end of the dance she found not only her place by Lady Curragh, but also Mr. Frewin, who had been introduced to her cousin by some acquaintance in the room. He was full of apologies for not paying his respects sooner, hinted that business for the Prince of Wales kept him more than busy, and, seizing an opportunity, took June to a buffet, and seated her in an alcove. He was dressed in the latest fashion, and seemed less out of place in the country of bricks and pillars, she thought, than he had been with sportsmen at Heughside. The conflict on Gunnerton Crags flashed across her. She could dub it as a mere incident now, in the triumph of success, and her hands to-day were as white as the secretary's. She laughed inwardly to feel herself a match for ten of his kind. She was reckless enough to play with the subject in their conversation; asked him whether he liked his present position better than his old one, and hoped it was more romantic and to his taste than writing many letters and driving across fells with women.

"My work is romantic enough," said the secretary, smiling a little grimly.

"And what is it?" she queried frankly.

"It is not so easily described," warded the secretary.

"The enterprises of the Prince are many."

"And various," said June, with a keen look.

The secretary bowed with an expression of indifference.

"Politics, which I trust never disturb your peace—the Irish dilemma and such trifles. Unfortunately, we cannot all be so gay of heart and careless of consequences—not even the Regent himself—as, for instance, our young friend Conway Dorren, whom I met in Bond Street to-day."

He looked at June, but she was always on her guard now.

"He is not a courtier, alas! alas!" she sighed; she longed to ask where he lodged. "And he is fresh from school."

"He knows how to play, at any rate," sneered the secretary.

"Study is wearisome," said June quietly, "and Lord Ibbs is an exacting guardian. I was never good at my lessons, as you know, Mr. Frewin; but I am sure it would crack my poll to read the dreadful old stuff that they teach in universities. Now, confess you agree."

A Masquerade at the Princess of Wales's 155

The secretary did not like the double reminder that he had played the schoolmaster but had never been at college, and so he unhooded his spite.

"It has gone near scattering our friend's brains," he said, "for he is the wrong side of the barrier this time, and must needs put more powder into his weapons the next time he wishes to write himself Bachelor of Arts. His friend Maudeslay, who was with him, has come out with pennons flying and high honours. But Conway consoles himself. Do not be alarmed on that account."

By this June knew that Conway had failed in his college test, and still was nothing abashed. She set her face, and thought of many things; and for once she wished herself a fruit-woman, that she might attack this dapper man of the pen without loss of dignity.

CHAPTER V

A MASQUERADE AT THE PRINCESS OF WALES'S

IN the briar hedges and grass ditches that lay between Kensington and Bayswater there was comfortable room for footpads and skulkers and all who prefer damp beds to dry ones and ragged cloud curtains to clean ones of stout white dimity, chaste and reassuring. On the western side of the hill that overhangs Kensington Palace, the woods lay thickly massed in the summer of 1814. Inns were few, and nothing but the cottage of a ranger offered shelter. One house there was, however, not a mile from Paddington Green, which stood in a garden of modest size, but not ill tended. This house, had you compared it with the architecture which the Regent adored, was mean. It boasted no copings, no pilasters, no columns, no large windows, no bulging rotundities as pompous as the calf of his Royal Highness's silk-sheathed leg. The very gate, of rustic wood, would not latch easily, and creaked. It required nice driving to enter it and draw up at the wooden porch. The roof tossed up strange gables of different heights, topped by one taller than the rest, and you would never have guessed the space they covered had you not learnt to follow your hostess, Caroline of Brunswick, Princess of Wales and Empress of High Jinks, in and out of the narrow passages, up steps and down steps, in her hoyden moods of hide-and-seek.

The walls of her Royal Highness's cottage were demure. They told nothing; and whether they threw back her loud

laughter and her grotesque songs in *patois*, or blanched as she flung salt on the fire, or drew magic circles to delude her poor fancy into a respite from her griefs, these walls never even sighed. They were as discreet as that long-suffering and equally silent witness of their mistress's pranks—her lady-in-waiting-in-chief. Panelled in chintz all strewn with roses, these parlours looked under all conditions the pink of feminine propriety; but they were not so unresponsive as the grim Lady Anne Hamilton, who attended the Brunswick princess, for they did their best to enhance their strange guests and the stranger scenes in which those guests acted. To pure merriment they made the most innocent background, and certainly wore their best look on this July evening, when a gardener and flunkys, who had proceeded in advance from Kensington, lit the candles and spread fruit-tables in the garden. For on this evening Caroline's mandate had gone forth to her chosen friends and to a few others whose universal charity and loyalty to the despised deprived them of any claws that could be used in her despute.

She had commanded masquerade—that is to say, fancy dress. "No masks," she stipulated in her letter, signed "C.P.," to Lady Adela, "but bring your own friendly face with you, in a garb that is not of to-day. And you must be merry. Come as the Creator if you like, but not as the Avenging Angel. I must have laughter for once, for my *dragonne de vertu* is like a pickled sausage this fortnight, *et je meurs d'ennui*."

Lady Adela, nothing loth to be skittish at fifty, found some heirlooms and an Arab burnous, and June, though slightly contemptuous, was prevailed upon, under Molly's superintendence with the aid of some green gauze and roses, to represent a woodland waif.

Lady Adela's coachman had good pistols and broad shoulders. They reached the ramshackle wooden gate of the cottage in excellent time. When they entered, June was surprised to see how lofty was the central parlour, for here one storey of the cottage had been removed in order that the mirth might echo from soil to gable top.

A boy of six, dressed as Love, ran towards them, shaking his yellow curls as he slyly peeped from under them. He had a long feather in his hand, and this he twisted in the ladies' faces in a puckish manner.

"Come here, mine naughty Willikin," called a voice which made June start.

The speaker was the magnet of the glances of the entire company. The tall figure, the full shoulders, the colouring

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and the voice, were those of the lady who had come and gone so strangely one autumn day in the lower garden at Windsor; but this gay attire, this brilliant laugh—June could not reconcile the two impressions.

"You are pretty," said the boy pertly to June. "Come, we will run together to the Princess," and he clung to her so tightly, and tugged so hard, that she was fain to let herself be dragged along, for fear of tearing her dress, or slipping a-heap on to the polished floor. Hence she, stately Court lady in the Queen's employ, went running, in spite of herself, with the eagerness and abandonment of a milkmaid, hand in hand with Love, into the presence of Her Majesty's well-hated daughter-in-law, the Princess of Wales.

"An omen, an omen!" laughed Caroline. "*Ach!* Willikin, you are making my guest quite confused, you rogue."

She nodded and shook hands most genially with June and her escort, lifted the boy into her arms, kissed his laughing cheeks with vehemence, and told him to run away to the musicians and bid them tune. They made a fine and horrible scraping over it too, and June, who had woven the mellifluous rhythms of Mr. Händel into her knotting night after night at Windsor, while their Royal Highnesses played the harpsichord, could scarcely understand the jig which the orchestra started presently. There were dances, too, which she had never seen, and so for a while she stood in a recess watching the antics of her Royal hostess's friends, gazing with all her eyes at this strange woman, whom she could not have imagined in any mood save that of tragedy. It was strange, too, to see the exaggerations of the features of the daughter in the mother. The hair, the build, a little movement of the shoulders, a way of throwing the head back before a laugh—all were the same. But the Princess of Wales had a high colour which flushed her neck and bosom also, and now she seemed younger than her daughter. Her costume, as she gaily told every one, was that of Ceres—and a quaint mixture it was, truly, for the chief part of her in which you could discern a suggestion of plenty was the area of shoulders exposed.

Her robe was half in the fashion of a ballerina and half aped the mediæval night-frock of an Ophelia. It was of green tinsel, with a jewelled girdle knotted below the waist and reaching to the feet. Her hair was done in the fashion of the day, and she had set in it a carved yellow comb, but over all had added a flat green wreath of myrtle, tied at the back with green ribbons, which floated down on to her nape. Slung across her

shoulders by a chain was a monster gilt horn, in which a showering bouquet of flowers lay cunningly fastened. As the dance quickened, she tossed this quiver of hers over her shoulder like an impatient child, and when she turned, her draperies gave a glimpse of her favourite scarlet stockings and French boots of black velvet, high heeled. Her fine, full arms were bare, but on her hands were grey riding gauntlets with scalloped and stitched edges, and in one she held a French fan, just large enough for you to see. Lady Adela, happy with her gossips, kept up a running comment on a seat just outside June's recess. She had put up her eyeglass, and was evidently enjoying herself with a tall elderly gentleman, in a plain Court suit, who stood by her.

"What did you say was the character Mrs. Thompson has adopted?"

"'Tis that of the Queen of Plenty."

"A dangerous choice, is it not? I have heard from certain cousins of Lady Anne Hamilton that this poor lady cannot obtain any salary for her services, and that moreover her private fortune makes her liable to act treasurer at any moment."

"Well, well; the dress is green at least, and that is the colour of endurance they say," said a new voice. It had a tinge of playful irony, and the sentence flashed out quickly, the words tumbling over one another as from an irritable brain.

"Ah! you are always kind," purred a lady; "but Sir William Gell will perhaps tell us what the green stuff is on the head. Is it garlic or a salad?"

"Myrtle," bowed the elderly courtier; and then with a twinkle, "a chaplet in memory of chastity much mourned——"

"You are in profound error, sir," replied the voice of the unseen gentleman, cooler, more ironical, and more measured. "What you see on the head of her Royal Highness is a crown of mimic laurel, in token of harsh sufferings lightly borne. The manner of supporting them may be strange to you, but the crown is none the less hers. I think you will not deny that the rightful honour which is denied her by her husband and by the Queen is supplemented by fate, which gives to her the whole heart of the people for a robe, and its pity for a sceptre. Madam—sir—we are her guests."

There was an exchange of stiff courtesy, and the speaker, passing his companions, sought the alcove. What he found there was a bright-faced girl, a smile trembling on her lips and her hand outstretched.

"I have a reckoning with you, Mr. Heseltine," she said;

"but you ran away from Curragh before I could close it. That was when you went to fight, you know."

"And you find me in the wars again," he said, laughing, without a touch of his irony. "I am in the mood for it all. Let us have our reckoning at once."

"Oh! I cannot," she said, confused, and remembering that only wounded pride had been at the bottom of her excitement. "We will leave that for the moment. I did not know you were in London. What——?"

"What am I, a professed man of peace, doing in war rejoicings? Surely a man may rejoice over such a peace as this?" She shook her head.

"But you do not care for routs, and parks, and operas; and you know you abhor princes. Fie!"

Mr. Heseltine looked at the girl with amusement. She had acquired much independence of manner. She expressed herself less caustically, and she used her hands to accentuate her speech, where, not six months ago, she would have fidgeted quietly with her necklace. Her grace was more articulate.

"It is true that I do not love princes," he said, seating himself in the other corner of the alcove couch.

"Is that because princes do not love you?" she asked boldly.

Frank and jovial came the answer:

"Why, that certainly is one half the reason, but on my honour not the Irish half. In truth we find no use for one another."

"Now I must reform you," she cried, "for if I ever take to scribbling, like Glorvina, I will make a good volume on 'The True Courtier.' You know that I am at Windsor?"

"In the Queen's employ? You should not be here."

His tone was almost stern and wholly reproachful.

"And why not, Mr. Dominie?" said June, hurling defiance.

"To serve two masters——" he began stiffly.

"I am here of my own free will, Mr. Heseltine, for this is my holiday. I have come here with Lady Adela Lupton. She is not the mawkin whose levity you crushed just now," she added mischievously, "but a friend of her Royal Highness, to whose daughter I act as companion and playmate when she comes to Windsor. See how you censure innocent me."

Her new vivacity gladdened and disarmed him. He noted that her lips had learnt to pout. He began to laugh softly at finding himself so observant, and half his amusement came from his universal love of humanity. He looked at this girl and thought what a child she was, in truth, and how prettily she had caught the inflection and attitude of fashion, and almost grieved

too, this dreadful fogram, to think that she could not always be masquerading in grey-green, a mirthful maker of holiday.

"I see you have already made an impression on our pocket Adonis"—he indicated a smart young hussar who approached with Lady Adela. "Your dragon is bringing him to you."

"Who is he?"

"Captain Hesse, a devoted friend of our Royal hostess; but I would rather he were her enemy. The Princess of Wales has more to fear from her partisans than her foes," he added under his breath, as the hussar came up to be presented, and led June away in a *contre-danse*.

Later on, however, she found her cynical friend in the same quiet nook, and returned to the attack.

"And now tell me why you are here," said youthful and persistent June. "You are bound to play champion to some one."

"Madam, you are irony itself."

"Sir, I have a good master, surely."

"I have come here as a guest to-night, and because I have the Irish terrier's nose for spies, Miss Cherie. But the business that brought me to London is another matter. Once here, I found I could be of service to her Royal Highness in a small matter of law, which I once had the vast trouble of learning, and, the other business detaining me, I came here. You are not listening; you are looking at her Royal Highness and thinking that she enjoys herself strangely."

"Yes," said June, shamefaced.

"It is not surprising. If you were an older woman, I would lay her wrongs before you. As it is, I will not shock you so. Yet there is, believe me, more native dignity in that flashing toe of hers than in all the ermines and purple of Carlton House, and I hope it may be proved. The Princess beckons you."

"Come," called their hostess, "I am dying of thirst. Dere is wine in the garden. *Mein Gott!* how warm my Joan of Arc must be in her Elizabethan collar. *Wie?* you do not know who is my Joan? Dat is my beloved *dragonne*, Lady Anne. Good creature! I say to her she must robe as one of the Fates' queens, for it suit her style. How she grimace, Miss Cherie! And she has slyly made herself into Maria Stuart. Where is *mein kleines Pepinchen?*"

She flung herself laughingly on one of the garden benches and chatted merrily, drawing a circle round her. Foremost was the lady whom June had called a mawkin. She had sharp eyes. The Princess singled her out instantly.

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"Ah! Lady Oxford," she cried, "it is nice of you to take pot luck. Come and sit by me. How well dat rose colour suits your rouge," she went on spitefully. "How I envy you, for you can be as pale or as ruddy as you desire. I get always *purpurroth* vid exercise. Tell me, did you see de Queen yesterday, and was she all mustard or only pepper because you had called at Connaught House first?"

"I did not presume to broach the subject, madam," said Lady Oxford, who did not look cheerful, even under her rouge.

"Ha! ha! ha! But her Majesty knew it, for she must have seen my coachman drive you up. I wish I gone wid you, God's truth!"

And so she badgered her guest till the woman ordered her coach and fled, glittering with anger.

"Dere now, Willikin, Cerberus is gone," said her Royal Highness, springing into the air with relief like a boy. "Let us have supper, and Willikin shall cut his birthday *gâteau*."

Her good humour returned. She beckoned Mr. Heseltine to her own table, and put June not far off on the opposite side. Sir William Gell was at her right hand, Lady Adela on her left, and little Willy waited on her playfully. Presently she lifted him on her knee and made him cut into a mound of rosy sugar in the centre of the board. On the summit was a pastrycook's conceit, a sugar effigy of a prince with a crown on his head. She began to laugh.

"We will play at cannibals," she cried, "and Willikin shall bite his head off." She shot a keen glance at Mr. Heseltine. "Here's to the sugar Prince of Wales," she said, looking round the company.

The majority joined in the toast with half-stifled laughter. Sir William cleared his throat, Lady Adela tittered, June cast her eyes down. Mr. Heseltine alone faced the Princess. He was leaning slightly across the table at right angles. His lips were parted. He gazed boldly at her, daring her to further indiscretion. She put her glass down untouched, and, in lifting her hand again, hurriedly knocked it over, and fell back into her German d's and v's.

"Pho!" she cried, "dis is poor wine. Ve vill have fresh, and more ice. *Mein Gott!* dis sultriness kills me."

The coloured lamps made the scene so gay that no one had noticed the hiding of the moon and the absence of the breeze; but in the silence that followed the strangled toast, big drops were heard plashing on the elms overhead, and ere the servants had brought the fresh wine the thunder was booming dully. A

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vivid flash of lightning made every one start, and then came a crack so loud that it seemed to shake the trees overhead. Willikin screamed and hid his face in the Princess's gown.

Some one ran for her cloak. Disconcerted, scared, she rose hurriedly and fled indoors, ordering the curtains to be drawn close. The revellers rose in confusion and began to collect in groups in the dancing parlour. Only June stood at the door and watched the lightning, a contemptuous smile playing on her mouth. Mr. Heseltine found her there.

"You have chosen the best place," he said, "but I must not let you stay, for the Princess seems indisposed, and Lady Adela is leaving and asked me to bring your hood and mantle."

"Can we not take you back?"

"Thanks; I must see the Princess home," was the almost curt response.

"How that Irishman kept the Princess in order!" laughed Lady Adela as they drove. "There's a man, my dear. She takes a vast deal of handling."

June did not answer; she was wondering what Con was doing in Bond Street with comedy actors.

CHAPTER VI

A DANGER, AND A COMMISSION

A FEW nights later, the avenues to His Majesty's Opera House in Pall Mall were packed with curricles and coaches, flower-sellers and the hawkers of peace tokens and souvenirs.

All the rabble of Soho had sallied forth to see their Majesties and Highnesses, native and foreign, witness a gala representation of "Orfeo." Those who lined the road chattered that the roses with which the theatre was wreathed had cost a million, and one wight, who pretended to have had his peep inside, called out that only the Princess of Wales's box was left bare. That made the excuse for an uproar, which was scarcely quelled when her Majesty's outriders cleared the way in Pall Mall. The murmur died then, and most hats were raised, but June shrank from the window as heads pressed against the glass.

"What have you done with your Brunswick niece?" shouted one ruffian, and then came hisses; but the coach dashed on, the Queen, sitting bolt upright, looking straight in front of her as if she saw and heard nothing.

In the Royal dressing-room, behind her Majesty's box, June

met Colonel Goldsworthy, and as there was not room in the box in which Miss Planta and others sat, they occupied a small *loge* on the opposite side of the house. Thence she could see the glittering circle of kingly guests and their hosts. The Czar sat next to her Majesty, and on her other side was the Regent. The King of Prussia wore a morose air, for he did not like the odour of Imperialism which hung about the shoulders of his brother of Russia. Resplendent with jewels, gay in white, with touches of black gauze—a chastened widow's mourning for her late husband—was the sister of the Czar, the Grand Duchess of Oldenburg, whose coquettish head and white shoulders were instinct with all the pertinacity of a schemer. An impudent face, but good humoured, June thought, as she watched the Kalmuck beauty make play with the Regent while she floated on his arm to her seat. Ere the Regent had taken his place, June was startled by a commotion in a different part of the house. Then she saw that the Princess of Wales, who had entered unobtrusively, took her seat, and entered into conversation with her lady. Every face in the house was turned towards her. A little timid applause began in one corner of the area. It grew to a storm, and people called her by name. The Regent, a self-satisfied smile on his face, bowed in reply, appropriating the greeting; but for a moment Caroline stood at the front of her *loge* and inclined her head three times, and again the applause rang out as she drew back into comparative shadow. Colonel Goldsworthy shrugged his shoulders, and laughed to June:

“That is a nice little snub for the First of Gentlemen; but his wife will have to pay for having come here when she was not wanted.”

A sudden burst of music drew all eyes back to the stage again. Until Orpheus had hung his rose garland about the tomb and wailed himself and his love astray into the world, June's ears and eyes were entirely absorbed. The equerry interrupted her thoughts.

“Fie! Miss Cherier. You've no eyes for the dark-haired cavalier who is fixing you with his glasses. There, in the area. Look! Gad! 'tis the very young gentleman who came one day to ask for you at Windsor. Oh! the sighs that tear him, and the flame in his eyes. He is a very pretty youth, indeed. There, 'twas kind of you to bow. His countenance is now like the sun. See!—he rises, he is coming.”

But the curtain lifted afresh, and June was glad to have time to face the apparently inevitable. Presently Colonel

Goldsworthy departed on some official errand, and she found herself alone. She shrank into the farthest corner, her heart knocking wildly. Disdain of herself conquered, and she moved back to her old place and sat well forward, her eyes very bright, her arm lying carelessly on the velvet parapet. Conway looked up, a "May I come?" in his eyes, and she nodded gravely. A minute later he opened the door of the box.

"You are alone? What fortune!" He kissed her hand. "How you play with me, Madame Cruelty!"

That made her pettish, and the "Madame" she took as a personality.

"No melodrama, pray, Con! Take the other seat, and tell me where you have been all these months."

"Hear her! Good Lord! at Oxford. Where else? Nearly worked myself into a purple fever, and all for your sake."

"I have not asked fevers of you, but sober earnest."

"Have I not given it you? Term closed but two days ago. I have scarcely been twenty-four hours in town."

"And your debts?"

"Is this all you have to say to me, June?"

She looked away coldly.

"Why did you not answer my letters?" she said at last.

"It was a luxury I withheld from myself till I had passed my test," he faltered.

He was indeed very sorrowful, and she almost believed him. Still, she hardened.

"How could I know that you wanted my letters?" he continued sadly. "Your own are so bare, so full of prohibitions—always the Queen this and the Queen that. It is you who make her the barrier between us, dearest and most cruel."

He was sufficiently in shadow to take her hand. His disadvantage taught him cunning. He was not sure that she had heard of his college failure, but he half guessed it, for he had expected an eager inquiry and had dreaded her bitter disappointment; but for this prolonged haughtiness he was not prepared. A thought came into his head. He drew further into the shadow, still holding her hand.

"Can you give me a moment, June, by turning your chair so that I can see your face when it cannot be seen by others?"

She hesitated instinctively, apprehension written in her eyes, and tried to withdraw her hand.

"I am still a gentleman, June, although you do not care to acknowledge me as your husband."

"Ah!" she gasped, "you are more cruel by far to me

than I to you. Have you forgotten your own words to me at Windsor? Will you face my Lord Ibbs to-morrow?" She laughed hysterically. "Come, I will do as you wish."

She pushed back her chair and turned to him behind the curtain draperies. Her hand lay in his, dead and unresponsive. He stooped and kissed it again.

"I have a proposal to make," he said, "it is for you to accept or reject. You are estranged from me; you weigh me in the balance. I know by your letters that I am not close to your heart. See"—he drew himself up and threw back his comely head with a mighty effort—"I will give you your freedom, June. From this day till you call me to you I will be dumb."

"It is not a wife's part to call," she answered proudly. "'Tis a man's to master, and then the wife may give; but there must be service on both sides, sir."

"Have I not sworn to serve you?"

"Certainly; you have merely shifted your vows to the service of Mr. Kemble."

"Oh! That? A man must use his wits in making friends."

"With comedy actresses, sir?"

"June, Mrs. Flowerdew is a creature of enormous talent. She has promised to create a part in my piece."

"And when will that be, pray?"

"I will answer you when you have answered me. Do you want me, June?"

She lowered her head.

"I wanted . . . a man."

"God! I'll go away for ever, June. I know it now—you can love better elsewhere."

She stopped him, trembling with disdain.

"Spare your indignation. I have not troubled to cast my eyes about for any one."

"I will go," he said with bitterness. "No one knows of this but ourselves and greasy Hulse at Heughside. You are free. Do you consent?"

The lights of the house were suddenly lowered, and the music gave her support. For a moment she yielded her confusion to its flood and opened her senses to the sound. Then feeling became too acute, and battered sensibilities lay dulled and apart, while the music, now dim to her, moved on with apparent aimlessness. In twenty seconds was fought the hardest battle of her life.

She turned to her husband. The knowledge that he had

put her to such a test and would have had her bear the burden of a double falsehood made her suddenly all pitiful towards him. She touched his arm gently.

"We have enough to hide now—I from the Queen and my father, you from your guardian. This other compact will only lead us backwards. It may be that real love will come. Even so, neither of us is free. My stepmother wails to me in her letters of want and distress. I stay here with hands tied, waiting the Queen's decision on my service with her granddaughter. It is not a merry picture that I show you. It takes courage to gaze on it day after day, and wait." Her hand suddenly slipped down to his, and he felt that it was burning.

"Oh! for a man's freedom and a man's learning. You have all the world before you."

"If I could only bring it to your feet!" he cried rapturously, swayed by her mood.

A step was nearing.

"There is the Queen's equerry," she whispered, and the eagerness faded to disquiet. "Please go; you cannot stay here. I dread Court chatter."

A hand parted the curtains some seconds later. June had covered her face with her fan and turned to the stage. She was surprised that Colonel Goldsworthy did not advance to his seat. His silence was curious, and discomforted her. She looked over her shoulder. If it had been a corporeal evil genius in a cloud of unholy fire that stood before her, she could not have been more sensible of danger. Yet Mr. Frewin's brisk advance was that of a man who has business to transact.

"The music delights you?" he asked.

"Oh! of course. It is all a marvellous spectacle."

"You sit idly and look on. Would you not rather play a part?"

His eyes held hers. Then he made a movement that was impatient of vagueness and delays.

"You can play, if you wish; in a little drama that is neat enough, and I will tell you who is the centre of it—the little Princess. Have you any commands from the Queen?"

She threw back her head.

"The orders of the Queen are not for publication in the journals of Carlton House."

Again he was impatient.

"This is not a silly babble of secrets; it is a mission to your hand. The Prince Regent, when he has a matter at heart, does not seal it with the affixed signature of all the Cabinet."

She studied the man beside her. The Regent! Ah! if it should lead to his favour for her father! She played with the notion, probing her motives.

"If it brings me nearer to the young Princess, whom I love——"

The next moment she regretted that confession, lest it should harm those she desired to serve.

He caught at the suggestion.

"It will bring you very near indeed."

"But the Queen?"

"She will make no difficulty. The Prince entreats—remember, entreats—your assistance."

Her eyes brightened. A splendid Prince! His reputation? Ah! yes. But to serve the young Princess! She was silent, in hot debate with herself. Frewin rose, and gazed over the edge of the box.

"Our young friend from Oxford is back in his place, I see. I met him in the passage here just now."

"That is most likely."

She regarded him steadily, and waited for his next shaft. He put his back to the stage, and returned the gaze.

"A rash act leads to great embarrassments," he said gently.

The orchestra began to tune.

"It is better to make a friend of a lie than to deny it."

His tone was almost wooing.

An hautboy player ran up the scale and down again. The strings grunted.

"If it should come to the Queen's ears that the youngest of her ladies has entangled herself irrevocably, it would go ill with the future chances of that lady at Court."

An impatient flute gave an irritated flourish. A horn boomed slow discontent, and the strings scraped on.

"These things are not new—they are as old as history; but disgrace is always young."

The persistence of his malice maddened her, like the dropping of water on the forehead of a creature in bonds. June rose too, choking with anger, as she pointed to the entrance of the box.

"If there were disgrace upon me, I would not offer to serve the young Princess."

"You are gloriously indignant. I speak merely to warn you. Private matters and Court intrigues rarely agree. You must choose now between them."

"Have I not chosen long since? You have my answer."

"Then to-morrow you will come to Carlton House?"

She made the very slightest assent possible, and remained standing until he had gone. When the conductor tapped his desk she did not look round again.

Presently she started, thinking her senses had tricked her, for she became aware of the eyes which had so often checked her in her moods of defiance and exaltation. But it was no mere vision this time. The Irishman stood alone in the box which but a moment earlier had held the Princess of Wales. Unseen she had left the theatre. He stood there carelessly, and gazed with a smile on the strange bevy of furies and lost spirits in sheepskin and tarlatan that flooded the stage. Yet behind him, outcome of June's excited fantasy, there still seemed to hover a woman's figure, tall, full-bosomed, with bright cheeks and arch eyes and fair hair; and it was not a dancing figure in green gauze crowned with myrtle that she saw, but that of a passionate woman in dusky robes, and lips parted with a little cry: "*Ach!* what a poor devil am I!"

A mist came before June's eyes. When she looked again the *loge* was empty.

CHAPTER VII

CONCERNING CARLTON HOUSE AFFAIRS

ALL those about the Regent agreed that his confidential creature was the perfection of a leisured personage. The room in which Sir John Macmahon pulled all the strings which set the Regent's toys a-working was named his "bureau"; but there was no sign of any business here, secret or other, and now, as he sat at ease in one of the ormolu and gilt chairs, one leg delicately crossed over the other, he had not the air of anything more than a chamberlain whose life is rounded by the fashion of a stock and the spelling of a *menu*. Edward Frewin sat opposite, with some papers on the table in front of him.

"Here are the details."

The secretary handed over a note-book. Sir John read them carelessly.

"Most circumstantial. These matters are rarely so exhaustively stated."

"Fourteen days' hard work, and plenty of kicks into the bargain."

"Well, well! Apprenticeship, Edward, is not a bed of roses. And the matter is nice—deep in its significance, of enormout weight to your future. But a note-book! Who but a born

clerk would confide such a matter to a note-book with numbered pages?"

"It is better to be a good clerk than nothing. Those who are responsible, sir, for my existence are responsible for the schooling I received. No doubt they wisely ordained that clerkship, like the ideal republic, should be self-sustaining."

His tone was concentrated bitterness, and his eyes were riveted on the other.

"To be self-sustaining is surely the first duty of a man," was the smooth rejoinder. "To learn to live upon the favour of others is an even higher task, requiring finesse and generalship. Therefore note-books must be avoided. You understand? When does the girl come?"

"In half an hour's time."

"Are they ready for her at Warwick House?"

"Yes. The Queen has arranged it with Miss Knight."

"A nice little snub for the darling duenna."

"I think she is by this time resigned. The Prince's recent appointment of Miss Mercer Elphinstone broke in the excellent Cornelia well."

"Miss Elphinstone is out of London?"

"Yes. I think it can be contrived to keep her away till over Thursday."

"Humph! In heaven's name, why does she not marry her duke and take herself off altogether? She is neither useful to the Regent in promoting this Orange marriage nor in keeping the Princess of Wales from their daughter. She knows too much."

"A disadvantage from which this charming Northumbrian maid is quite free," smiled the secretary.

"H'm. Does she seem sensible of the honour?"

"I think she knows what is likely to be useful to her. She is plastic."

"I do not credit plastic people with too much simplicity. There is, for example, the Grand Duchess of Oldenburg. Her tactics are never the same two days running. In half an hour you think you have produced a profound impression, and the next morning she runs off in exactly the wrong direction. She coquets in the most desirable way with our great George here, and then I find her throwing the little Orange at the head of her own sister. However, the little Orange is not quite a fool." He took a turn up and down the room. "When did you last see Brunette?"

"Yesterday, at my rooms. She states that the Princess of Wales has ordered a travelling pelisse and several new valises."

"Charming! Does the *Gazette*?"—Sir John pointed to the note-book—"state the day on which these articles are to be delivered?"

"Within a week—that is, to-morrow."

"Exquisite! What reason, then, that her Royal Highness should delay her visit to her ancestral home in Brunswick?"

"She wishes, according to Brunette, 'to give the allies a last chance of behaving like gentlemen.' Hieronymous, her chamberlain, has been run off his feet; she sent out her cards to all the foreign sovereigns, hired two French *chefs*, and grand preparations were made yesterday; but the feast went back to the kitchen again. As for Brunette, she is, unhappily, a little *gourmet*."

Sir John chuckled. It was some moments before he finished chuckling.

"There is nothing now but the warrant, sir."

"Here it is."

Sir John yawned, and flicked the dust from his sleeve with a jewelled finger.

"Always enchanted to get rid of papers; vexatious things, papers—too much litter, Edward"—he pointed with a grimace to the rolls on the table. "Papers and note-books—great mistake. They give an impression of perspiring effort. Success does not come from too much perspiration, my dear Edward."

Frewin hurriedly thrust the rolls into a cabinet and locked it.

"Have you thought how best to keep this girl quiet?"

"I have turned over several ways. Nothing, after all, is so deceptive as pure candour. It will serve to make her suspicious of Caroline, and undermine Charlotte's belief in her mother."

Now that he laughed, the ring was the same as that of Sir John's voice; but it was younger, fiercer, more bitter.

"Well; I leave it to you. The Prince will probably be of the same opinion; and if the interchange of letters fails owing to a sudden access of caution on the part of the Princess, there is always Brunette."

"There is only this one matter to consider. If Hesse is removed, there is still the Irishman to tackle."

"Not he; he is too clever to compromise the woman."

"Still he encourages her—*la Bourgeoise de Brunswick*—and so long as she works upon her daughter's feelings, the marriage of the little Charlotte is farther off than ever."

"It is the mother that he is after."

"God bless him! He is welcome. If only——"

The two looked at one another. Both laughed again. Then the elder courtier shook his head deliberately.

"No, Edward. A bold idea, but it shows your youth and ambition. Leave it out of the question. These Northern Irish make a 'Bony' of their chastity. No; we must trust to the Brunswick cavalier to put his Royal patroness at a disadvantage. Once the mother is compromised, the rest is easy. Then, presto! present to the romantic girl a mere broomstick, with its hand on its heart and the insignia of royalty on its poll, and the thing is done. And, besides, the charming Charlotte cannot do better than an hereditary sovereign like the little Orange."

"A checkmate indeed, sir."

The eyes of the older man glistened.

"You grasp? You understand? It was only after I had suggested this alliance to the Prince that the humour of it all burst upon me."

"It makes the whole affair marvellously simple."

"Of course. In the first place, there is precedent—that of Mary II. It is not as if Charlotte were to be coerced into marriage with a small principality. In the second, her suitor will be the reigning sovereign of a distinct Power, and this is sufficient to induce her to live out of England, at least during her father's reign."

"Sir, it is possible she herself may urge another precedent—that of the first Mary."

"Well, well; we shall see. At any rate, Count Haas has framed the Dutch marriage proposals on the lines suggested by the Prince. There is no mention whatever of residence in England during the Regent's lifetime. She is very quick, but we have wrapped the thing up by suggesting, on the Prince's behalf, that a set of apartments, in St. James's, shall be allotted to her after her marriage for her use during her annual visits to her own country. You observe that this maintains a certain dependence on the Regent, but has the effect of apparent isolation. This is the only point in the settlements that may startle the pretty little hare. Other precautions have been exhaustive."

"The young man appears to be behaving with charming obedience."

"Sly young dog; he knows."

"Count Haas's suggestion that his Prince appeared to be slighted at headquarters by having no official residence, like the rest of the Royal guests, was a master stroke. It reached Charlotte's ears as quickly as one could wish. Brunette says

that she went to Connaught House after the ball at her father's, and nearly cried her eyes out in her mother's arms because the Regent let her suitor sleep in rooms over his tailor's instead of at St. James's."

"Capital; but I am not anxious for this state of affairs to continue. The Orange is naturally getting bored and tired of dancing attendance. I met him yesterday where he ought not to have been, unattended, with a charming woman. It does not matter how charming, if only she were not known. She is too well known, and I had to take him away."

"The sooner the Princess of Wales's leather-merchant sends home those valises the better."

"Exactly. Once the Prince has arranged this matter, he will have more time to tackle the other."

"If he could marry again, and should have a son!"

"Your youth, Edward, is the most enviable thing about you. Of course it cannot be yet. Such a crisis could not be hurried on after the trial of 1806. *On se recule pour mieux sauter*; but it must be a proper jump this time. It must clear the bar of the House of Lords, and that not by an inch or two, but by several feet. By that time you, Edward, will be an accomplished lieutenant of the Regent, and worth much."

"You have touched on an interesting point," said the secretary. "Genius requires feeding. The lieutenant of the future has to live."

Sir John shrugged his shoulders.

"To live is a great problem, Edward, in a profession in which a man is paid only by results."

"That is only for a man who has already some foothold in his vocation. It is not enough for me, sir."

"Can one make conditions with the Regent? He shares my views. He does not like little pieces of untidy paper."

"But he agreed to a definite commission, at least, on this marriage arrangement."

"Not exactly. That is a little private affair between you and myself. When I receive the money, I pay you—that is all."

"It is not enough. You scoff at my going back to clerkship. It is your place to provide a substitute."

"My place? Really, Edward, you are as truculent as a boy over his alphabet. You hurt me."

"Did you ever stop to think how you hurt me, sir, thirty years ago?"

Over the smoothness of the other passed a wave of moroseness, as of a disagreeable reminiscence.

"I never thought of you at all, Edward."

"Then there is time to repair the omission now, and I intend that you shall repair it. I must live like a gentleman. In time I shall marry as a gentleman. It will be to your interest to see that this comes about. You cannot now endow me with your name, but you can make amends by giving me your experience and your direct interest."

"I am not a lover of parables, Edward. Incidentally I wish to know what has been done with your little harvest made at Kew?"

"It was only a poor little sum after all, and I had to pay the Hamburg fellow out of that."

"The Hamburg fellow is modest. Where did the rest of the £5,000 go?" The secretary pushed back his seat with an oath. "My dear Edward, you are too generous. You are as bad as little Charlotte, who cannot buy any new dresses because she will give priceless souvenirs to all the sentimental old dowagers about her. You must be more careful of your pin-money, my dear son."

CHAPTER VIII

JUNE'S ERRAND

It was full half an hour between the time that Edward Frewin conducted June through a lane of scarlet flunkeys at Carlton House to a small drawing-room facing the gardens and the moment when she started to find that a tall elderly gentleman, very pimply in the face, and very careful as to his linen, was bowing in the centre of the room.

"The Prince is ready to see you, madam."

His noiselessness was astounding. Not even the creak of a buckle marred his smoothness as he led the way. His voice was level. It reminded her curiously of the secretary. His perfumed cravat, his finely cut Carlton uniform, and the exquisiteness of his wrist ruffles, were in amazing contrast to his mottled complexion and his bad teeth.

The Prince of Wales was alone. She was very glad of it, for her knees still trembled. The Regent saw before him an alert girl, small of limb, of middle height, with deep eyes set in a spare face, and a mouth, not over small, resolutely closed. He waved his hand, and the courtier who had led her thither vanished as if by magic.

"Is Mr. Cherier's daughter to be trusted even as her father was trusted?"

It was a cunning appeal to June's pride.

"It is not for me to say, sir," she responded, curtsying low. Audacity, hope, recklessness, flung the light into her eyes and the richness into her voice.

The Prince Regent measured her from crown to heel as he lay back on the divan. A slow smile spread over his face.

"Do you find Windsor entertaining, Miss Cherier?"

She shot a glance of distress at her catechist.

"Vastly, sir," she said proudly; but the twitch at the corners of her mouth betrayed her.

The Regent burst into a laugh.

"You are a virtuous woman, madam, for you cannot school your face."

"I have not been long at school, sir."

"So much the better for the object which I have to explain to you." He pointed to a seat and she glided into it obediently.

"The Princess Charlotte's affairs—I tell you in confidence—are in a critical condition. She is of a marriageable age, and is my only heir. It is very necessary that the succession should be doubly assured. You have doubtless heard all the stock rumours. No public announcement can yet be given. What confidences has the Princess made to you?"

"None bearing on this subject, sir."

"It is of the utmost importance that I, her father, should have the key to her dearest wishes."

He appeared to battle with generous emotion. She asked herself, amazed, whether this could indeed be the profligate gaoler that Lady Adela's fancy had painted so often.

"Her happiness—my child's happiness—is the chief object of my existence," continued the Regent. "Some one has spoken against the Prince of Orange in her hearing. She is as impressionable as a child of seven. She is naturally romantic. Her roving fancy makes her a prey to all manner of suspicions. It will be your work to allay these, and distract her mind."

June's heart leapt with thankfulness that the task was so simple.

"I will serve your Royal Highness faithfully in this."

"It will also be your duty to ward off all hostile suggestions and warn me of any attempts to ensnare her affections and views in other directions. I mean that my unhappy wife"—feeling overmastered him for a moment—"the Princess of Wales—is doing her best to upset this union. Princess Charlotte looks upon herself, therefore, as the victim of a species of Smithfield marriage, and upon me in the light of an ogre. I have borne with this ingratitude as long as I dared; but

the correspondence between Warwick House and Connaught House must be checked. In short, there must be an exercise of censorship. All letters that pass by your hand between Princess Charlotte and her mother must be submitted to my discretion before delivery."

She could not refrain a start. She tried to speak. At last her words stumbled out.

"Will not your remonstrance with the Princess Charlotte have more effect than my poor intervention, sir?"

"I wish to allow her the natural play of her affections. I do not desire to coerce her more than is necessary. No suspicion will fall on you."

"It is a hard task, sir."

"You need have no scruples. Is it not enough that you are ensuring the happiness of the Princess? When I asked whether Cherier's daughter was to be trusted, I did not think she was assailed by silly fears."

She felt the snare drawn closer about her. The mention of her father, the reminder of her own insecurity, came upon her as a new shock. She forced her pride back and answered with as much disdain as she dared show.

"I have no fear, sir."

"Then there is no more to be said. You will observe the usual conditions of secrecy. I wish no word uttered—not even to Miss Knight or Miss Mercer Elphinstone. You will go into residence at Warwick House to-day. Mac!"

The smooth, pimpled gentleman reappeared.

"Miss Cherier is ready. Take her to Princess Charlotte."

A small swing gate of rustic wood was the only means of communication between the two gardens. In that of Carlton House the roses and stocks bloomed in orderly array, and the shrubs were fantastically cut and artfully disposed; but beyond the wooden gate the borders were high and wild, and the trees wayward and leafy, and in this garden there was sweet rest, and here the shadow that seemed to lie upon the other was left behind.

Miss Knight descended from the terrace in starched suspicion.

"The Princess is indisposed," she said to June. "I will send up your name."

A fair girlish head looked from an upper window.

"Huzza! It's June. Come up, June. I am so sick of calomel and hartshorn, and they won't let me drive in the Park to see the grandees."

The apartment into which June was led was full of muslin

and gaiety. It was the only room in the house in which the hangings were new. Roses clambered to the windows, heliotrope sent forth delicious odours. There were couches and dainty china and pictures.

"Come and brush my hair for me, June. You do it so softly."

June obeyed.

"Look there," said the Princess, "you haven't seen my new picture." She pointed to a large portrait over the mantel. The girl recognised the handsome Prince of Orange. "He isn't bad looking for a Dutchman, is he? I danced with him at papa's. Does every one think I have made up my mind?"

"How can I tell, madam?"

"Because I've *not*. He certainly has a way of twirling his moustachios that is simply distracting." She laughed. "But I shall not marry him unless—unless he promises that I shall live in England, and receive my mother whenever I choose. The Ambassador is here, you know, and yesterday the Regent and he wanted me to sign a stupid long paper to say I would marry the little Orangeman; but I didn't know quite what was in the paper, so I said I would like to see him first. No, no, I don't belong to any one yet. Take the picture down; it makes me cross, I think. I will hang up this one instead. It always shocks Miss Knight—it is that beautiful Captain Hesse who is such a friend of mamma's."

"I met him at Bayswater, at the Princess's cottage, madam."

"Did you dance with him?"

"In a country dance, madam."

Charlotte sighed.

"I should think he would make love deliciously—much better than the little Orange."

"Madam!"

"Well?"

The Princess's cheeks were scarlet, and she kicked the stool with her satin sandals.

"Is it well to think such things?"

"Am I a baby?"

"No, you are a woman, and you are in love."

"Not with the Dutchman, certainly." She gave a little bitter laugh. "I tell you I will marry just when I choose and whom I choose; and he is a friend of my mother, and I like him very much, and his picture is much nicer than the other. *There!*"

"May I not help you to dress for dinner?"

"I am tired."

"See, then, I will only pin in this lace—with this brooch."

"No, no. The little Dutchman gave it me."

"It is very beautiful; but if you do not love him, why do you accept this?"

"I don't know. He sent these. You put these on. Look, you shall wear them. This necklace is lovely."

"Oh, pray, madam! But it will look much prettier on your neck. Let me put them on you, and you can see how pretty a Queen you will make some day."

"There is no crown with these."

"He is keeping the diadem till the last moment, to give you with his hand and ring."

Charlotte shook her head sadly.

"*They don't mean me to have a crown.* That is what it means."

"But you are an heir."

"Only presumptive, as that stupid Ambassador took so much trouble to remind me. Oh! if I had a brother I would give the crown gladly to him, so that we could shield my mother."

"These are sad thoughts. Look!" June brought the mirror. "Your Prince is lying on the floor looking so sad, and you stand decked as if for a coronation."

"Let him lie;" but she smiled and her tone was not unkind. "To-morrow he is coming to ride with me. I will see—I will see how I like him then."

CHAPTER IX

CONWAY PLAYS FOR NOTORIETY

THE *Post* of the next day had the following paragraph:—

"The Princess of Wales, who, for some reason only known to those best concerned, has not attended the State festivities, with the exception of the opera, will go immediately to Epsom Wells to recruit her health, and will not return for some weeks, by the end of which time it is more than probable that very important announcements will be made respecting the Princess Charlotte. We understand that the marriage of the young Princess, which is of course inevitable, is heartily desired by the Princess of Wales, who fully endorses the claims of the suitor favoured by his Royal Highness the Regent, but whose name is not yet to be published."

Mr. Heseltine saw the announcement in the first edition, and strode out angrily to Fleet Street to post a contradiction in every available quarter. This done, he turned in at a green

door in Henrietta Street and called loudly. Steps on the stairs and an answering shout took him to the top of the flight, where his hand was gripped by a short, spare little man with the quick eyes and thin face of one whose energy keeps printers busy.

"Come in, come in," he said, driving the Irishman into his room. "What business have you for me to-day?"

"None to speak of."

"What does his Royal Highness contrive?"

"Nothing. That is a little blind from Carlton House to help on this ridiculous marriage. Her Royal Highness has no intention of leaving town."

"Did you go to Wych Street last night?"

"No, there was too much to do. Here is a pamphlet for you, to be used in case there is any difficulty. Grattan passed it a week ago. Your notion of the annual Parliament rather sticks in the gizzards of most of us. It won't do, but you may put in the matter of the sinecures as thick as you choose. Five hundred copies first. What about Wych Street, Hone?"

"Only these young fools that swell our Reform ranks. I distrust their zeal, and I don't like the way Hunt lets them go; he incites them. They meet this evening."

"I'll go. Is it still at the Robin Hood?"

"Yes. I wish I could join you, but look at these arrears."

The publisher pointed to bundles of proofs on the floor and shelves.

"Do you anticipate special difficulties to-night?"

"No; all depends on the preponderance of zealots. If accident is for us, we shall have a better audience and a larger. It is these young lions that terrify those who would really work for us. My main fear is that any should be bought over to the police. It is not the first time that suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act has been threatened. At the last two meetings I have noticed a knot of curious fellows, one rather dandyish—black haired and bilious. They say he is about the Regent."

"I know the man. He is a poor creature."

"Well, keep things cool if you can."

* * * * *

The Robin Hood was certainly no fit temple of Cicero; but many of its nurslings who lived to make St. Stephen's ring with their epigrams enjoyed no sounder or more drastic apprenticeship than in the panelled room behind the bar, ill lit with oil lamps, while flaring torches were placed above the deal tables pieced together for a platform. Conway and Maudeslay, strolling past, turned in for curiosity. They speedily found

themselves the centre of chaff from a mongrel audience at the back. Maudesley was restive, but Conway speedily established good feeling by calling for a song, and an explanation of the gathering.

"Hunt will tell you," said his neighbour, "the first speaker that ever lived. You don't know Hunt? God alive! man, where have you been?"

A yell went up from the audience.

"Hunt! Here's Hunt. Put him on his legs, and Castle in the chair."

Rough and genial hands seized the demagogue and planted him on the centre table, and a little man in frieze with sandy hair and one eyelid that drooped, shambled up after him.

"Hone? Where's Hone?"

"Mr. Hone's business keeps him, gentlemen," said the man with the eyelid.

He intimated that Hunt would do double duty, and sat down on the only available chair on the table. When the cheers had subsided, the demagogue advanced to the edge of the platform and placed his feet apart.

"I am back this day from the Midlands, gentlemen," he began. "Our cause works well. The Hampden Club at Nottingham has funds to assist us if need be."

The concourse cheered.

"The research which I have made into the question of silk taxes and sugar is not yet complete; but I have no doubt, sirs, that when that is laid before Parliament, it will crush the Jenkinson party like an avalanche. Why, sirs, do we ask for relief from these impositions? Because we have at last seen the error of our weakness. The First Consul would be our friend, but we did not let him. We made war, sirs—deliberately did we make war. We have confirmed and fed that war. At what cost? At the cost of our true principles, which are against an autocratic Parliament and a monarchy. Dearly have we bought our peace, gentlemen. Under the cloak of patriotism we have played Judas to our own convictions. The love of blood—a brutal and savage thing, sirs—blinded us. Let us blush in our closets for it. What is patriotism, as the Ministerial party and its supporters paint it? It is only the barrier to universal brotherhood. We have been drunk with blood; but we have atoned bitterly. We have given our sons' blood to that Duke who is justly called a Man of Iron. Our daughters are unsexed at the looms and the collieries. Our sweat is turned to blood, and

our tears to fire. We toiled that war may go on. In that strange blindness we have suffered infamous burdens of taxation. What blinded us? That strange excitement, that delirium, in which bloodshed and deliberate instigation to bloodshed drags men. And all the while our oppressors, the makers of the war, must have laughed a thousand times. But to-day they shall laugh no more. The tables are turned. They know it not—while they sit in their high places and feast—while the Regent turns his house into the Palace of Heliogabalus. We are still sweating, still groaning. Men of England, whose blood shrieks for reform, how long will you sit and look on at this? On all sides the cry is 'Peace!' The very firmament rejoices over peace. Yet how can we join in her chorus? Is it peace for us who lie in fetters? Can we feast and sleep in down, and dip our fingers in rose-water! Peace? No, there is war, and the echo of our struggles will go back to those very heavens which are now filled with our false rejoicings."

A deep murmur punctuated the pause.

"Who are the men of blood? Whence do they spring with their rancorous cry of 'Supplies! Supplies!'"

"The Government must go on," said a voice.

"But shall we suffer and feed it on its present basis?"

There was a cheer.

"We have not forgotten York; we are good Luddites," called one.

"Luddites all," echoed the assembly, stamping with excitement.

"This body of gorging war-makers, whose brains are undermined by soft living, and their blood thinned by excess—it is not we who elect them."

"You are not fit to elect them, my good fellow," shouted a decisive young voice.

Maudeslay seized his friend's arm, but Conway's face was flushed and stubborn, and he was already pushing his way to the front.

"Whoever spoke, let him bear out his challenge," shouted the demagogue, amid a chorus of assent.

Heseltine fought his way along the wall to the edge of the rough platform, but the jostling did not enable him to reach it. He thrust his head as far as he could over the shoulders of those who stood between him and his object, and spoke to a man he knew who sat at the edge of the table.

"Tell Castle to stop this rash new-comer—to stop him at all

costs. The police are outside. Hone relies on Castle and Hunt to keep things steady."

The audience caught sight of the Irishman and yelled.

"There's a good reformer. Up with him."

"Gentlemen," said Heseltine, from the narrow niche in which he stood, "I ask you to excuse me. I am not able to do more than listen. Business calls me away before the close of the meeting."

"The people's business is your business," growled a fellow on the opposite side of the room.

"Where's your Princess?" piped a boy's treble.

Half the concourse took up the shout, with jeers.

Heseltine swept a way for himself, leapt on to the platform, and stood there for a moment with his cool, ironical smile. Then he bowed fastidiously.

"Gentlemen," he said, with excessive formality, "her Royal Highness is well. Some day, if it should go ill with her cause, she may need your sturdy support. None of you can forget that she has a daughter, her most precious pledge to the nation. Hats off, gentlemen, in the name of their Royal Highnesses."

Some uncovered, others doggedly refused, the weaker sniggered, and from the line of noisy fellows who led the jeers came shouts of "A Ministerialist."

Heseltine said a word to Castle, and stepped off the platform with deliberation. Castle wore what he intended to be a smile of conciliation.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," he said, "you are bewildered through sheer suspicion."

The groans subsided.

"My challenge has not yet been answered," said Hunt; "perhaps the speaker thinks that discretion is——"

At that, Conway flung himself upon the platform.

"Discretion is a pretty word, sir," he cried contemptuously; "it is a useful weapon for those who have nothing with which to back their valour. Discretion in such a case as this is for tabbies, and not for men." Then he turned squarely to the audience. "I take this gentleman's challenge. I question his authority. He has attacked our patriotism. He has tried to drive a shaft through the very core of our nation. What is patriotism? It is that which makes us fight gladly and bleed gladly. You are told that we are ruled by a bunch of weak-livered autocrats. How can you digest such wholesale lies? It is not true. The blood of the flower of English manhood is fitted for its work. The brains of them——"

A Lady of the Regency

"Quash him; he is one of them," shouted half the room.

But the boy only flung himself forward into the discussion.

"Gentlemen, upon one issue I am your friend. The monarchy is a poor thing. The Court is an absurdity. We support these idle fools——"

"Silence, young fool!" thundered Heseltine.

"Get down, get down!" said Castle uneasily.

"Go on!" roared the crowd.

"Down with the adventurer!"

It was one more whip to his excitement.

"Some one has dared to call me an adventurer, gentlemen; but I am proud to be so called, and I will give you my reason. Just now you applauded to the echo when your popular champion here flung mud at the Government, and at the race and quality of the men who represent us in Parliament. Gentlemen, in your frenzy be just. In their midst there is one, at least, who merits only your deep gratitude. You may call him aristocrat if you will, autocrat never. Think not of the blood, but of the man. Gentlemen, I speak of George Canning. He who cries day and night for equalisation of political rights, for freedom, was once also called an adventurer. Gentlemen, how noble a title, how magnificently he flaunted it in the face of malice! Have you forgotten his words? 'To this charge, as I understand it,' he said, 'I am willing to plead guilty. A representative of the people, I am one of the people, and I present myself to those who choose me only with claims of character, be they what they may, unaccredited by patrician patronage or party recommendation. Shall I be expected to apologise for so presenting myself,' said Mr. Canning, sirs, 'for so presenting myself to your choice in a free country where, in every walk of life, the road of honourable success is open to every individual?' Those, gentlemen, are the words of no one party; they are the simple creed of a reformer. Is there no health in such a man as that? It was the teaching of Mr. Pitt. This fellow"—Conway contemptuously indicated Hunt—"where among his kind will you find such a spirit as that?"

"Bravo!"

"Down with him. He is put up against Hunt by spies!"

With cry and answer the audience rose. Benches were overturned as the platform became a mass of struggling youths and men. Castle slunk to the door, and Heseltine pounded his way to the group which fell upon Conway. It was all too late. A heavy bully was at him, and Conway hit right and

left. Heseltine thundered. Some few fell sulkily out of the ring, recognising a better man than themselves. But the police broke in; the demagogue had disappeared; the assembly melted with marvellous precipitation. In the light of the flaring resin there remained only a handful, mostly elderly men, while the police carried out their orders.

Conway recognised his would-be friend in a flash, but it was then of no use. Baffled, enraged, with torn cravat and coat, he stood glaring at the constables, who jingled handcuffs. One of them guarded the door, at which Maudeslay hammered, calling his friend. Castle stood aloof, and blinked. Heseltine looked on in grim silence, watching his opportunity.

"Let me pass," said Conway; "I was invited to attend the meeting. You had better catch that fellow, curse him, who was so mightily bold a minute ago."

"A pretty story, my fine young gentleman," said the constable. "This gentleman here"—indicating Castle—"saw you attack the appointed speaker."

It was not the first time that Heseltine longed to strangle the secretary of the Hampden Club. He stepped forward and spoke earnestly.

"This young man is my friend," he said. "I will give my word to you that he goes no further, and attends no more meetings. If you will name the fine, it shall be settled as soon as he can communicate with his friends in the country."

"Against orders," said the constable. "I have no power to dismiss any suspected person without written permit."

"At least you will permit him to go without these ornaments?"

"Surely, gentlemen!" wheezed the blinking Castle.

So Conway Dorren walked up Wych Street and the Strand between the police, weighed down by shame and mortification that far exceeded the gyves from which his honourable estate as a county gentleman exempted him. At the lock-up he scribbled a few words on a pocket tablet, folded the sheet, and begged Heseltine to deliver it.

"You are fated, sir," he said, "to find me at a disadvantage, but I cannot forget what Miss Cherier told me of your kindness at the time of her family's misfortune. Let her know that I am safe—though, to be sure, she will not care much about that," he added bitterly. "Assure her that I did not court this—this vile insult; and"—his eyes grew piteous—"if she can come—to—see me——"

"I will ask her," said Heseltine quickly, wondering at the suggestion. "In the morning your friend will come to you."

I will see to it. And for God's sake hold your tongue! If I had seen you sooner I would have stopped your entrance. You must spare your praises of George Canning for ears more nicely critical of good rhetoric."

The irony was kind, but the boy tingled with shame and anger. The evening had been indeed a rough lesson for his vanity.

CHAPTER X

JUNE FINDS A FRIEND

STEPHEN HESELTINE waited till a decent hour on the following day before he made inquiry for Miss Cherier at Warwick House. Discretion forbade any mention of the episode of the night to the circle in Half Moon Street.

As he threaded his way along the Strand, he puzzled much over this friendship. He said to himself, "She has only played at a romance. They are children. She will come to her senses." And then he wondered at himself for paying even so much heed as this to the private affairs of youth. Still it vexed him excessively to be the bearer of news so silly and distressing, and with all his natural adroitness and sensibility it was hard enough to announce when it came to the point.

"Why does he send for me?" she cried, angry and bewildered with the sense of catastrophe.

"He turns to you naturally as one turns in a scrape to a friend. He begged me to explain to you and sent this note."

She took it, but he noticed that she did not attempt to read it, and thrust it away into a pocket.

"He is very jealous that you should not put him down as having merely been found brawling."

"How did it happen?"

He told her, magnifying the ardour of the culprit as much as possible, while he suppressed the love of effect which was the cause of the mischief.

"Tell me, *must* I go to him?"

"I cannot decide such a question for you, Miss Cherier."

She sighed and turned away, afraid to let her face be seen.

"If you do not wish it," he said in a matter-of-fact tone, "it is best to refuse."

"Everything is so difficult for me—here."

"Dorren does not realise the scandal that such an interview might cause in this household; but a young man in—may I say 'in love'?—is never considerate, Miss Cherier."

"But surely he can prove that he is innocent of any offence? He has only to write to his guardian."

"That is the difficulty—there is some little delay. But I am doing all that I can for him. Will you read the letter and write an answer, and I will take it back to him? I know you will be kind; he really is very penitent."

He laughed to chase away the trouble in her eyes.

"Penitent? He is always penitent."

Heseltine looked on with deep interest. So the affair was deeper rooted than he imagined!

"Then it is now the occasion to give him a severe lesson."

"You do not understand."

"You credit me with great denseness. I only wish to help you."

"No one can do that now."

"Fatalism is the refuge of the small-hearted and the small-brained. You are taking the whole matter too seriously. A boy's scrape! Forgive him, and soon he will be out of it and heartily ashamed."

Her face was still turned away. He wondered at her anger.

"I do not wish to forgive."

"You are your father's daughter, but at any rate you will do this youth justice."

She was still silent and enigmatical. He made one more attempt to get at her thoughts.

"I mean that if his importuning troubles you, it is easy after this to prevent further annoyance. A woman when she is young often confuses kindness with cruelty. Only you yourself can decide what is the true kindness in such a case. I am sure you cannot be selfish."

He was glad when the words were out. It is not easy or agreeable for a man to sound the state of a woman's heart on behalf of another man.

She cried out softly as if she were hurt. For a few seconds he could not fathom it. Then she told the truth in short, breathless phrases, and when it was over, she sat still, with senses dulled and throbbing head, her face in her hands.

"I am glad you have told me," he said.

She lifted her head and held out both her hands piteously.

"Help me, and understand."

He took her hands and held them gently as a woman might have done, except that a woman who comforts cannot forbear to caress, and his grasp was cool and strong.

"You cannot visit him now; the whole thing will only

lead to Court scandal. I will go straight back and explain. His college friend looks after him. I trust the necessary formalities will be quickly through. Lord Ibbs's influence is of course everything. The only danger was that tirade against Royal personages. Some fiend prompted that, for the boy is a Tory and an aristocrat from head to heel."

He could not repress a smile, as he recalled the face of the boy orator and its fastidious profile against that of the demagogues beside him.

"Now do not look frightened any more. It may be that as soon as the necessary fine is paid, the authorities will let him go."

"You are sure he is safe?"

"Perfectly. He has books and papers and decent food. His friend sees to it. Did you think he was in convict's garb already?" His laughter was irresistible. "Now give me a message—a kind one."

She scribbled a short note.

"When shall I know?"

"As soon as I can manage it. Unfortunately I have just had orders to call at Connaught House. I have no notion what the business is. It may keep me a day or two. Do not vacillate; do not look back. Your work for the moment is here."

She was thankful that breakfast was so late. It gave her time to remove the traces of that interview.

Princess Charlotte rose in a pet. At the table she flung aside her letters. One packet which bore the Queen's seals she squeezed into a ball, and flung it to her tumbling pugs. Miss Knight, who had not ceased to glower suspiciously behind the urn, suggested presently that she was willing to answer any communications with which the Princess did not wish to be troubled.

"Oh, that is from grandmamma." The Princess tossed the pulpy ball still further with a little kick of her satin sandal. "She is good enough to be much concerned about what she calls my *trousseau*, though who I am supposed to be going to marry I do not know. I wish she would give me a *trousseau* once a year. Why cannot one marry the world, instead of a stupid man? Do laugh, dear Miss Knight, and then June will help me send an announcement to the *Gazette*. It would so entertain my papa to see it to-morrow morning. 'The Princess Charlotte, we learn on good authority, is about to espouse the world, and the following elegant suits are being specially prepared for her Royal Highness by her Majesty's mantua-makers.' But I can't try them all on to-day, Miss Knight; I am going to ride."

Teasing, wilful, capricious, half malicious, half tearful, she spent the time running from room to room, till carriage wheels broke the noonday quiet, and then, whispering roguishly, "The Dutchman!" hurried away to dress. It was a part of her caprice, June knew, to keep the Prince of Orange waiting for the ride. When Princess Charlotte finally appeared, she held in her hands an embroidered letter-case. She drew June aside into the ante-room. Through the door of the saloon came the sound of voices—those of Miss Knight and the Royal guest.

"I want you to take this to my mother, June," whispered the Princess hastily. "Give her my heart's love. Tell her—tell her"—she choked the tears back—"no, tell her nothing but that I am well and am firm in my stand against being treated as an exile, and that I love no man in the world as I love her. Hush!"

The door opened suddenly, and the Prince of Orange stood on the threshold, bowing. Princess Charlotte drew herself up proudly. As June left the room to go and fetch her own pelisse and hat, the last vision of her young mistress set her wondering whether the affair with the hussar could be so serious as she feared. Princess Charlotte's face was now all brightness, softened by the plumes in her beaver riding-hat; and in the bosom of her rich blue Windsor habit, she had stuck a crimson rose. There was a delicious defiance in her every movement, and yet an air that seemed to say, "So long as you do not irk me, I will be kind, and if you are indifferent, then will I tweak and torture you till you pursue. This rose, good sir—do you covet it, perchance?"

CHAPTER XI

CAROLINE OF BRUNSWICK AWAITS HER GUESTS

THE Princess of Wales patrolled her drawing-rooms in Connaught House with an eager, expectant air. Her household, a motley array of servitors, English and foreign, stood in waiting in the hall below.

She was dressed with much gaudiness, but with more state than at her masque. Jewels were heaped on her neck, and wreathed in her hair. Her arched brows spoke impatience, and her piquant lips twitched. At every rumble of a carriage she started and looked inquiry at Lady Anne Hamilton, who stood sentry in the window.

Through the vista of rooms came here and there a light

laugh and the sound of dice-throwing. By a card-table stood the hussar.

The Princess signalled with her fan. He came, and she drew him aside into an alcove.

"Is it settled?" she said in a low voice.

"It is very nearly settled."

"How can I communicate with Charlotte?"

"Perhaps she will send a messenger; but I mistrust these letters to and fro."

"But Miss Cherier, for instance—she knows nothing—consequently she is quite safe."

"One never knows. Do not trust it to paper, madam. I will go, as I have done before, at night."

"I have already written, but I cannot fill in time and place till you have found out whether to-morrow suits."

"I will go and see Frewin."

"I detest this little black-haired creature. He suffocate me only to look at him. Is he necessary?"

"Madam, you know at what he aims, the scoundrel."

The colour rushed into her face.

"I know," she said. "Well, well! let us fool him, so long as he is necessary to us. You are sure he has no suspicion about Charlotte—God's truth?"

"Positive, madam."

"Have you a plan of the route?"

"Everything is ready, even to the carriage at Ostend."

"The fewer details the better. I shall take none of my ladies—only my maid and Hieronymous. What does the commandant at Brunswick say?"

"He has enough troops to hold the town."

"The fortifications are old, and the guns too."

"What matter? By the time force is necessary, surely England will rise as one man and demand from the Regent the restitution of your position and your guardianship of your daughter, madam."

He spoke with splendid conviction, and her depression disappeared.

"Whatever happens we shall get away—we three—and de Regent may whistle for Charlotte, but she will not go to heel for him." She sprang up and spoke louder. "I will give dem a nice fright. I will make myself felt. I am mother of de Regent's heir. Dey shall recognise it."

He made a respectful gesture of caution.

"Are you sure that the Irishman is not in London?"

"It is all safe. I sent him to Hertfordshire dis morning about some rents."

"That is well."

She sighed.

"He will be very angry," she said, looking out of the corner of her eyes at Hesse.

"Your Royal Highness lays too much stress on this man's opinion."

"Pho! You are jealous, my dear captain. I do not care what any man thinks." She turned abruptly, and hurried towards a servant who brought in a card. Her face fell. "Show Miss Cherier up."

June presented the package and gave her message. Now, with her eyes opened to the significance of the presence of the hussar, she was on the alert for every sign and every look. She noted how he stood aloof, yet with eyes ready to devour the package, how he walked into the further corner to hide some excitement, and how the Princess shook the little embroidered booklet, and asked anxiously if there were no letters.

"None, only her Royal Highness's love, ma'am."

Again the Princess called the hussar into an alcove, while Lady Anne Hamilton drew in her lips, lowered her eyelids, and continued her needlework at the window.

Caroline called for pen and ink. June stammered out that she could remember a message.

"But I prefer to write," said the Princess.

"I am careless, madam, and I might lose it—and——"

"No, no, I trust you." She sealed the cover rapidly and put it into the girl's hands. "I will give you a message too. The message is, 'Wait.' You will not forget? Are you going straight back?"

"No, ma'am; to the Pulteney Hotel, where Princess Charlotte drinks tea with the Duchess of Oldenburg."

"Ah! she is an amusing little cat, de little Russian; but I like her brother—de Czar—better. He has not de Slav nose of his little plump sister. I am expecting de Czar dis morning, and de King of Prussia too. Dey are great friends of mine. Ah! who is at de door, Lady Anne?"

"Only your Royal Highness's mantua-maker, madam."

"Silly woman! Why does she peal my bell?"

She patrolled the room again, chattering to the hussar.

"Who is it now?" she cried again, running to the window at the sound of wheels.

"It is at the opposite door, madam," said Lady Anne grimly.

"Ah, bah! If I cannot be de Princesse de Galles I will be Caroline—a merry soul. Ah! Scallini, come and make music."

The music-master glided to the harpsichord and began to play.

She plunged into the lyric in a full mezzo, while she beat time on the top of the instrument with her glove, and a garish parrotquet assisted the harmony with shrieks.

The burning day wore on, and the shadows grew longer, while her Royal Highness's retinue yawned in their double ranks behind the portals at which no kings paused to make inquiry after the health of the Princess of Wales.

CHAPTER XII

THE PRINCE OF ORANGE AT A DISADVANTAGE

JUNE took the letter of the Princess of Wales out of her pocket and turned it over and over. "Never vacillate!" She could not forget the Irishman's words. Why had she lacked the courage to refuse the note? It would have been so easy. It must not go to the Regent. She prayed there would be no opportunity of delivering it till she could see an honourable way out of the errand. She was burning to put her life into the hands of some one stronger and wiser than herself. Her fears for herself were nothing in the face of this evil business to which she had so weakly put her hand. Well, there was the Irishman. She would commend all to him and abide by his scorn, his pity, his sternness.

A line of dashing chariots stood at the door of the Pulteney Hotel. She made a shy entry, but Princess Charlotte beckoned to her prettily, and introduced her to several ladies who were grouped about her.

The Grand Duchess of Oldenburg was an ever-bubbling spring of *bonhomie* and vivacity, and when Lord Alvanley joined the company, she and he were like two sticks, so quickly did one strike sparks from the other. Charlotte clapped her hands with delight when the piquant Russian Princess capped the lord's latest jest on Romeo Coates with another on the abnormal *gourmandise* of the King of Prussia, whom the Oldenburg detested from the bottom of her fiery little Kalmuck heart. Presently she challenged the young Princess to a game of piquet with the Duke of Devonshire. The cards were scarcely dealt when the double doors were thrown open, and a company of gentlemen strolled in with some noise.

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"*Voilà, mon Prince !*" cried the Russian. "Well, how did the races go?"

"A magnificent day, madam," responded a young dragoon, on whose arm the Prince of Orange leant as he made his way across the saloon. He wore a long-tailed dull yellow coat, and was not in visiting dress.

June noted with astonishment that his manner was free, and that he was totally unlike the dapper young officer who had called at Warwick House at noon. He strolled across the room, supported himself with one hand against a piece of statuary, and made a deep obeisance to the Princess, who seemed startled at his entry.

"I hope you are well after this morning's exercise, madam," he began, with great gravity. Then he laughed with an air of patronage. "Gad! madam, you treated me shamefully in the riding-school to-day. Would you believe, Duchess, whenever I rode by Princess Charlotte to assure her of my devotion and respect, she flicked that filly of hers so neatly on the nose that she danced away, and set my chestnut prancing as if he were on hot cakes. That is pretty behaviour towards a poor lover that has crossed the German Ocean all of a hurry in the worst packet-boat that ever put to sea, and languishes in a dingy London attic for her smiles."

He turned round, as if appealing to the company, and then he slid gently down on to the divan beside the Princess, smiling at her in a way that made June long for breeches and a riding-whip.

For a moment there was a dead silence. Then Princess Charlotte faced her lover and coolly answered:

"I think, sir, you are mistaken, or else the gentleman with whom I rode has gone back to Holland all of a hurry too in that same packet-boat. I counsel you to follow. I wish you a prosperous voyage."

Upon that she turned, and bade the Grand Duchess a cold good-night. The Prince, with dazed eye and wavering gait, would have escorted her to her carriage, but she curtseyed and flung back, "I thank you, sir, but I do not need your assistance. I am . . . a good sailor," and passed down the stair, attended by Miss Knight, who wore an expression of holy horror, and made gestures of dismay to June.

The coachman turned down a by-street.

"What is he doing?" asked Charlotte.

"It is desirable that we should choose the quieter road home," said Miss Knight anxiously.

"Absurd! Tell him to go through the park. I will have the

carriage open ; I will not be cooped as if I had done something to be ashamed of."

The parks were crowded. The Royal carriage came too suddenly upon the loungers and vehicles to be at first recognised, but in a second or two the eagerness of those above was caught by those below. People stood on chairs, the carriages pulled up on each side of the drive, and the occupants rose as Charlotte passed. At the park gates, pedestrians rushed into the roadway. The police, in the absence of outriders, were unprepared for the passing of Royalty. A gaily dressed woman flung the bouquet from her bodice into the carriage, and a man, pressing close up to it, shouted, "God bless you and your mother."

Charlotte turned pale with emotion. Miss Knight gave a little shriek. She dreaded a riot, and a scolding from Carlton House to follow. But the horses' heads were clear, and the coachman put them through the gate almost at a gallop. June, fascinated, looked at the little Princess, who sat up stiffly, her head turning from side to side, as she acknowledged the greetings of the crowd, a wistful smile on her face.

Arrived at Warwick House, the spell seemed broken. She almost fell as she hurried up the stairs to her own room, she whispered excitedly that June must come to her.

"Is there a letter?" she asked.

June was on her guard.

"There is a message. The message says 'Wait.'"

Charlotte burst into tears, and the Princess's old nurse hurried in, full of reproach.

"My dear lamb, you must rest."

Charlotte seized June's arm, and began to laugh.

"Did you see him—did you see him? The future Orange King—the Emperor-Elect of Pippins! Is he not an enchanting lover? There is too much oil in the lamp for me!"

CHAPTER XIII

JUNE IS INITIATED INTO A PLOT

THE consciousness of the undelivered letter pursued June through the brief summer night. The very starlings seemed to chatter of it as day broke. To wait—that was all she could do. She examined the packet a hundred times to make sure that it was intact. She shut it in a drawer. Five minutes later she took it out and confided it to a jewel-case. Once

more she replaced it in the pocket of her gown, thinking it safer there, in case Stephen Heseltine should call. As every bell pealed she started, and noted that Charlotte started also. The two girls cast covert glances at one another. Each seemed to dread the suspicion of the other. A noise of stamping horses and men's voices sent them both to the window. Mutely the Princess pointed to the door, and June hastened to investigate.

"The Prince of Orange and the Duke of Sussex, madam."

"I am ill—make any excuse. Stop! Take the Dutchman's picture back to him. I will write a few words with it."

"I beg of you to reflect——"

But Charlotte was already scattering sand over the note.

"Fetch me a taper," she commanded.

"Madam, I cannot. I will not assist in the sealing of such a letter. You must not send it. It is undignified."

"Oh! very well. It can go unsealed. I will twist it up into three corners like a valentine, and I hope he will like it—the little Pippin."

She rang the bell and gave portrait and billet to Mrs. Lewis. June curtsied and was about to follow.

"Stop! You are quite right, and I am wrong. But I must make the Hollander understand that an Englishwoman does not love a man when he is tipsy."

"Oh! madam, do you think I did not feel the insult last night as much as your Royal Highness? It is only that I am afraid the Regent may make any action of yours an excuse for fresh severity."

"Pooh! If he does I shall appeal to Parliament. I will write to Mr. Brougham now. He is my mother's adviser, and he is a great lawyer. He knows all about it."

She began to scribble, tore up six sheets, and began again. Miss Knight passed to and fro, throwing up her eyes in despair, while June embroidered doggedly by the open window.

At one o'clock a page brought a letter for the Princess, and said that a messenger from Carlton House waited for the answer.

She read it and ran in terror to Miss Knight.

"My father says I am to go over to him at once. It must be about the stupid Dutchman. Take care of me, dear Knighty. Say I cannot go. I am ill. They will make me promise anything, the Regent and Mac between them."

Remonstrance merely served to work her into a fever until the *gouvernante* grew alarmed.

"I will go instead," she said soothingly.

June was in the parlour below, just breaking the seal of a letter. To her vexation it was not from Heseltine. She did not recognise the hand. It was a brief message on business from the Princess of Wales. She ran upstairs in answer to a peevish summons.

Charlotte threw her arms round her friend.

"If my mother knew that my father was angry with me, she would come to me. Why does she not write?"

"Here is a message, madam, from Connaught House, asking me to fetch an enamel watch for you from the clockmaker in Wimpole Street."

"Oh! go quick; and go and see her too, and tell her about—about last night."

June ordered a coach, and drove fast. She had but one desire—to warn, to implore the Princess of Wales, and to return the letter. It would be hard enough, but it would be better that Heseltine himself should know the truth than that she should shield herself at the expense of the woman for whose honour and safety he toiled. The drive to Connaught House was short, but her thoughts travelled many miles as she drove, and by the time she alighted, the flame of her purpose burnt so clearly that no sacrifice seemed too great.

From this pinnacle of heroics she was flung headlong when she learnt that the Princess was away.

"Where?"

"Blackheath."

"When does she return?"

"Not for some days. Her Royal Highness took some luggage and her maid."

"Where is Lady Anne?"

"Away on a visit."

She then asked for Heseltine's address. No one knew it. She walked back to the watchmaker's, striving to sort her thoughts from their tangle.

She hunted, and found the shop at last. The goldsmith received her with great formality, and with his assistants bowed her into an upper room, saying they would bring the watches for her inspection. She chafed, surprised at the delay, and turned sharply when the door opened to request the bearer of the articles to hurry, for she was eager to get back. She nearly sank on the floor in astonishment when the hussar, after locking the door, sprang forward and took her hand.

"Ah, how late you are!"

"I went first to Connaught House."

"I wanted to save you the trouble." His manner was agitated. "Forgive me, Miss Cherier, but I am about to entrust to you a secret which none knows but myself outside the Royal lady concerned. The Princess of Wales trusts you, she relies on your help—the Princess Charlotte also. You have been kept in ignorance as long as we dared. The Princess wished to spare you as much anxiety as possible; but now that our plans are ripe you must know, lest at the last moment your love should foil the happiness of the Princess Charlotte. I will tell you only as little as you need know. It is this—she longs to live with her mother; she is wretched at the coercion practised concerning her marriage. It makes my blood boil to think of the brutal sacrifice of her youth and beauty to any princeling that happens to flatter the Regent."

He walked up and down the room. June stood dull and amazed, and dreamy.

"Tell me quickly," she said wearily.

"It is this—Princess Charlotte is to join her mother to-day at Blackheath."

"She has a bad ankle and is not allowed to go out."

"The whole thing is pre-arranged. Miss Knight we know spends the afternoon with friends, Miss Elphinstone is not expected in town till to-morrow. You are left in charge. At four a chaise will be waiting at the head of Warwick Lane. Your mistress will come out by the garden door. Her maid will know nothing. You will be summoned to her milliner, who calls by the Princess of Wales's order. You will receive the woman in the blue parlour. You will come out, having seen nothing and heard nothing. I myself drive Princess Charlotte down to Blackheath. She must start at five, for the frigate is lying off Gravesend."

"Off Gravesend?"

"Yes; we must catch the tide, and then we go——"

"Tell me no more. Where is Mr. Heseltine?"

Hesse looked at her without flinching.

"He is gone on to make arrangements."

"It is extraordinary! He said he would be back to-day."

"It was necessary to give a definite reason for his going."

A step creaked on the stair. The hussar unlocked the door and called the goldsmith.

"This lady cannot wait for ever, Mr. Reed."

The man hurried in.

"This was the watch her Royal Highness specially liked."

"That will do; you can pack it up."

CHAPTER XIV

JUNE TAKES MATTERS INTO HER OWN HANDS

THE little Princess ran up the stairs, making petulant search for her friend.

"Oh, you are back. Why did you not come and tell me what my mother says?"

"She is out."

"Well, can I not go and wait for her?"

"That is impossible," said Miss Knight, who arrived on the scene. "If your Royal Highness cannot walk across the garden to Carlton House, it will seem very strange if you go to your mother."

"Oh, I hate you! You are in a plot against me."

Charlotte went to her room and shut the door sharply. Miss Knight shook her head.

"It is best to leave her alone, Miss Cherier. The Regent has sent for me again: he is very angry. It will not be a pleasant interview. I leave you in charge till I return. Miss Elphinstone will soon be back; her baggage is already here."

"June!"

Charlotte stood at her door, and called softly.

"Come in and talk to me. I feel frightened; I feel my mother is in danger."

She began to cry.

"You are very ill and over-wrought, madam. Tell me what is in your heart, and I will do my utmost to help you and save her."

A sudden caution veiled the bright face: she pursed her lips.

"Nothing. Oh no, there is nothing. I am very foolish."

The two girls stood now as they had stood many times at Windsor—face to face, looking into one another's eyes.

"May I not bring your Royal Highness some fresh flowers?"

"It doesn't matter. I shall not want—I mean it is only waste, June, dear. They die so fast."

"There is a bud on your favourite rose-tree—the white one with the pink heart."

"Does not white mean hope?"

"It surely means everything sweet, madam. May I not bring you the bud?"

"Yes, yes. I will send it—I——"

As she passed out into the terrace June saw that the clock in the dining-room pointed to three o'clock. Heseltine's absence was a profound mystery. She stepped back into the

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house and rang for a servant, feeling her inquiry to be hopeless. When the man answered that a note had come for her during her absence, she almost broke into a shout of thanks. It held only a few words, but they said distinctly: "I shall be in London by four, and will come on to you after paying my duty at Connaught House."

She walked out into the garden, trying to steady her thoughts and nerve herself to face the little Princess. Armed with the knowledge that Heseltine himself had been tricked, she feared no obstacle that could place itself in the way of her mistress's honour. Mechanically she found her way to the white rose-tree that climbed a wall of partition between the Carlton and Warwick grounds. The gardeners had evidently been snipping. The promised bud was gone. June stood on tiptoe. There, on the very top of the wall, leaning over into the Regent's territory, was another bud—its exact image. But how to get it? She saw a crevice in the wall, put her foot into it, and fell back, tearing her hands and bringing down some of the stones.

"Are you thinking yourself at Tyneside, Miss Cherier?" said the secretary from the other side of the wall. "Those happy simple days! Oh, how you have torn your hand! It doesn't do for a Court lady to show scratches."

"In a good service, Mr. Frewin; I want that rose for the Princess."

"Well, how is she? Is she reconciled to her lover?"

"To whom do you mean?"

"The Prince of Orange, to be sure."

"A nice lover! I saw him last night—a Prince fresh from an alehouse."

"The fool! He is making it very hard for his ambassador. Does the hussar still make eyes?"

Her quick colour pleased him.

"Captain Hesse never comes to the house, as you know, Mr. Frewin."

"Confess he is beautiful enough to alarm the jealousy even of a Prince."

She felt that he was probing for something. She let her eyes droop, and gave her head a little toss.

"There are plenty of people in whom Captain Hesse takes interest."

"Oh yes! Are you sure he is to be trusted?"

"I know that he dances delightfully."

"He will dance away altogether some day, and he will not go alone."

"Hush ; don't let us talk of these things."

"Will you let me reach the rose for you?"

"No, do not trouble."

"There are much finer ones in this garden."

"Oh ! but I am in a hurry."

"I have something of importance to tell you. Will you not come to the wicket?"

She hated herself for her fear of the man, but she yielded, and some curious instinct told her it would be wise.

He opened the wicket.

"You have never seen the Regent's garden. It is most beautiful."

He led her along the avenues, and past the waterways, which joined the lakelets and fountain basins.

"Indeed, I must not waste time," she said. "Miss Knight has left me in charge of Princess Charlotte."

"Ah ! guard her well. There are conspiracies afoot. The girl does not realise this drawback to her of her mother's reputation."

"I do not understand you."

"I mean that it is not easy to find a suitor for the hand of the daughter of a Princess who has only come out of a State trial of her virtue with a verdict of nothing better than 'Not Proven.'"

"It is not so."

"Not in the letter, but in the spirit. The whole thing was against her. And this child—this Willikin, as she calls him—who is he?"

June confronted him haughtily.

"I wish to hear none of your sweet suggestions, Mr. Frewin."

"I humbly beg your forgiveness for shocking you. You are not an old hardened courtier like these other women. But the Prince wishes his daughter to realise fully at this critical moment that her future lies in her own hand. She has been terribly injudicious to-day in denying admittance to the Prince of Orange, and she does it evidently under the belief that her husband, whoever he may be, will consent to receive her mother at their mutual Court. It is better she should know at once that such a step can never be contemplated. She persistently regards this hussar fellow as her mother's champion and her own. He is nothing of the kind. No one knows it better than yourself."

He watched June's colour turn to ash, and was almost sorry, like a man who has deliberately singed a fly in a flame.

"I cannot understand," she faltered. "Is he in love with——?"

She could not say the words.

"Not more than the Irishman is in love."

"I wish you would speak plainly," she cried. "You simply croak in riddles."

"Do you want the truth? The Princess of Wales is so deep in love with the handsome captain that she contains herself no longer, and is gone off to Brunswick with him."

"It is false."

"It is not. The two of them sent the Irishman away."

"If there is neither glory nor gain, there is but one reason left—and yet that is impossible."

Where had she heard these words? The bay window at Curragh Castle, the balcony, the two voices that floated through the folds of the curtain came back to her. If the Irishman could not save the Princess of Wales, who could?

"Either you lie deliberately or you are misinformed," she said at last.

She turned on her heel and walked back to the wicket. It gave her time to scheme. At the gate she looked over her shoulder.

"Mr. Frewin."

He followed her eagerly.

"Where are my promised roses?"

"Now you thaw."

"I am not glass or salts."

"You are the Queen of Summer."

"Oh! do not pay me compliments. I did not come back for that; I have something to tell you."

She laid a quivering hand on his arm. Her soft hair, high knotted, made her small neck look like that of a delicate boy. Her hand made his blood race. She was very close. If she kept it there! She did keep it, scarcely conscious that she did so.

"Of the Princess of Wales I know nothing. I cannot believe what you say. But I feel that the young Princess may commit any injudicious act; therefore help me, and watch the door that opens into Warwick Lane."

She lifted the latch of the wicket.

"My rose, June."

She gave him one hurriedly, letting her eyes droop again.

"Let me go. My Princess is all alone and very troubled."

As she passed through the dining-room again the little silver-toned clock struck. A whole hour gone!

She crept to the lane and looked out. The chaise stood at the end. Back she ran, her feet scarcely touching the stairs,

and found Princess Charlotte pacing her room like a caged creature. Something in June's face startled her.

"You have heard something. My mother is ill?"

"No, no! The Princess of Wales is as safe as yourself, madam."

"But where is she?"

"Shall I go again and find her?"

"Yes; I want to know if she is safe."

"On one condition—that you stay here till she comes."

"Yes; unless I am driven out."

"What should drive you?"

"My love for her."

"If your love for her is as great as your love of her honour, you will wait."

"Ah!" Charlotte pointed aghast out of the window. "The Regent, the Regent! Look! And Sir John Macmahon and the Bishop of Salisbury and Count Haas! Why do they come? What have I done to be treated like a naughty child? Look how angry he is! He will send for me. I will not marry the tipsy little Dutchman and go away into banishment. Look! He is really coming here. Hide me. Let me go with you to my mother."

June opened the door and called the dresser. Mrs. Lewis came in alarmed.

"The Prince of Wales has sent Miss Knight in advance to request you to go to him in the blue parlour, ma'am. Miss Knight wishes me to prepare your Royal Highness."

Charlotte stamped her foot.

"Your father wishes, madam," said June firmly.

"My lamb, let me tie your hair-ribbon; your Royal papa must not see you, ma'am, with your loops all tumbling down."

Mrs. Lewis tied the last loop, and gave a deft touch to the curls.

June held the door open. Still with her hands clasped behind her neck, Charlotte hung back. June conjured a smile to her lips; she backed a few steps and curtseyed on the landing.

"The Prince Regent desires the honour of an interview with the future Queen of England on matters of state," she said. And Princess Charlotte, looking neither to right nor left, passed down the stairs.

Mrs. Lewis, with groans, went back to the servants' quarters. June waited till she disappeared, and then returned to the Princess's room. On the French bed lay the grey cloak and sarcenet bonnet with roses which Charlotte wore on her daily

drives. June snatched up both and hurried to her own room. There she tore off her uniform, and put on a grey slip almost the colour of the cloak. She dived into the pocket of her uniform for the letter.

A moment more and she had crossed the terrace and walked boldly across the lane to the shrubbery. Through the windows came angry voices ; but she smiled, for at least one portion of a great danger was avoided. Once inside the shelter of the laurel shrubbery, she was able to run to the garden door. Before she lifted the latch she paused to clasp the cloak and tie the bonnet string. Then she ran up the lane, pulling the bonnet over her face. The door of the chaise swung open, the driver saluted. The horses sprang forward as the last stroke of the hour rang out from St. James's.

She lay back in the chaise, sick with excitement. The hussar flogged the horses mercilessly. When they crossed the river, she put the window down and gazed out upon the gardens and fields and dusty white hedgerows. At last she dared to look out. There was no one in sight—nothing but a drove of sheep in the far distance. The speck on the straight road behind her might be anything. She looked again. It might be a chaise. The hussar pulled up for a moment, sprang down, and came to the window. She pulled her veil down.

"We may be pursued, madam."

It was upon the tip of her tongue to declare her identity, but something in her cried "No."

"Yes, yes," she answered ; "go on faster."

CHAPTER XV

THE PURSUIT

STEPHEN HESELTINE rode up to the portico of Connaught House in the burning heat of the afternoon, and earlier than he expected. Indeed, the clock stood at two quarters earlier than the hour he had named in his short message to June. He was dusty, parched, saddle-sore. The business at Watford had proved a wild-goose chase. The Princess of Wales's tenants there were flourishing, and either were ridiculous grumblers, or else some one had much exaggerated their complaints. The grievances were puerile, and he was fairly perplexed that his mistress, so careless in all matters of business, should have laid such stress on his visit of personal investigation. He was surprised that admittance at the house was so tardy, and

astounded when he noticed that it was partially shuttered. Gone to Blackheath, and only yesterday? Yet she had vowed that she would remain in London till her daughter's betrothal was either announced to the nation or altogether abandoned.

He was uneasy, and rode to Captain Hesse's lodgings. It did not reassure him to learn that the hussar had sent away some personal baggage that morning. He paused. The streets were sultry and breathless, and he was in need of food and a change of dress. He went to his own lodgings, watered his horse, dressed quickly, and was in the saddle again by half-past four, reckoning to arrive at Montague House in Charlton as her Royal Highness rose from dinner. His horse was not altogether beaten, but he did not calculate on the delay of a loose shoe. At Deptford it played him false; and he halted at a forge just outside the main buildings on the high road. He spent the half hour's waiting strolling between the forge and the near turnpike. A chaise galloped up to it and passed through. Five minutes later another rattled along the road. The gate man was slow to answer the summons, and the driver shouted and raved.

"You seem in a deuce of a hurry, sir," said Heseltine, "so I'll open the gates myself."

The occupant flung him a shilling out of the window. For one second the Irishman saw his face, the next he cursed the owner of the coin, and the shilling went spinning after the chaise. He strode back, and found the farrier knocking in the last nail. He could scarcely wait for it. When it was done he gathered up his reins and gave chase. Three black objects on the road travelled into the sunset almost at an equal distance. Sometimes the centre speck gained upon the first, and now it was the last that lessened the distance. Once the second speck halted, and the third drew rein also, and then the man on the dusty foam-flecked horse spoke out loud to himself.

"If this be Frewin, and that the thing or person he pursues, who is in that first chaise? Do they go the road that I go? If not, why am I such a fool as to trouble?"

Well, he would know in another quarter of an hour, where the roads divided to Greenwich and Charlton. As he swung himself into the saddle again he laughed. The uncertainty tickled him. All his fatigue was gone. The three specks moved on. He strained his eyes. The first passed the turning to a windmill, the second passed it too. One more turn and then the cross-roads. He dug his heels into his horse, lest he should miss the view there. And he gained.

The first speck reached the signpost Heseltine knew so well and took the sharp right-hand turn. A hundred yards after followed the second. He saw these horses also curve to the right. With a shout he shook his own reins and urged his beast on. She covered the ground magnificently, and he too turned the corner, taking the mare on to the broad turf edge of the highway. It was good, soft going, and again he won yards. Now he could see the scarlet markings of the wheels of the second chaise through the dust-clouds. A few seconds more and he cantered almost level with the chaise windows.

"Hallo!" he called. "Fall back and drive a decent pace. I want company."

The secretary put his head out.

"The Princess of Wales expects me to dinner," he called back.

"Strange; she usually dines at four. Apparently her other guest is late also."

Heseltine pointed with his whip to the first chaise. Then he dug his heels into his horse, shouting over his shoulder:

"I'll go on and see the soup is not allowed to cool."

The gates of Montague House loomed grey in the soft light. The first chaise rolled through and on up the winding avenue of ivied elms and beech. Heseltine was at his wits' end to understand it all. The secretary's malicious grin pointed to some desperate bit of foolishness on the part of his unhappy mistress and some impossible scheme of the hussar.

The chaise clattered up to the entrance. Even before it stopped June had wrenched the door open. In a minute the hussar was off the box.

"The side entrance; quick!" he gasped.

She ran as he directed, and knocked for admittance. The door was flung open.

The Princess of Wales threw her arms round the girl and drew her into a room on the left with a low murmur of thankfulness. Heseltine, meanwhile, tied his horse to a tree and ran up to the door to interrogate the driver of the chaise.

"You fool!" growled the hussar. "So it is you that have chased us?"

"I do not know what 'us' signifies; I have been chasing that infernal little rat, Edward Frewin, and he is on our heels."

Even as he spoke the other vehicle galloped up.

Caroline fell on her knees clinging to the girl.

"Say that you came of your own accord, my darling," she sobbed.

There was the sound of a slight scuffle.

"You cur!"

It was Hesse's voice.

"Stand off, Hesse," interrupted another, at which June's pulses leapt.

"Now, Mr. Frewin, your business."

"The Regent's business. I come to arrest Captain Hesse for high treason."

Heseltine laughed.

"Show your warrant."

"Time enough."

"Your reason?"

"He has aided and abetted in carrying off the sacred person of the Heir-Apparent."

"Your proof of this?"

"The confusion of this gentleman is alone sufficient, were it not that I saw her Royal Highness herself enter this chaise at Warwick House."

"You have no warrant," thundered the hussar. "You insult the Princess of Wales as much as you insult her daughter in this insinuation."

The secretary smiled slowly, and stroked the beaver of his laced Court hat.

"I do not trouble with any insinuation," he said; "I boldly accuse. As for my warrant, I will produce it when you, gentlemen, produce the young Princess."

Heseltine's quiet, ironical tones fell upon the tremulous silence like drops of freezing acid.

"So much bluster and fluster outside the walls of a court of law are surely unnecessary, gentlemen. Is not the whole case to be solved by no less a person than the little Princess herself? She is far too conscious of her own position to stoop to play at hide-and-seek."

But Hesse was not to be held.

"You cur!" he sputtered. "We are two to one here; it is not a chivalric position for a soldier, but any means are lawful in such a service. If you are missed from Carlton House and found in a ditch, who will lack you or give you credit for dying except as a fool in some hole-and-corner affair of so-called 'honour'? Since you are so chary of your warrant, let me encourage your backwardness by reminding you of the Royal permit that I hold. The sex of the two persons whom Captain Lewis is ordered to take on board is in no way specified upon it. If the Princess of Wales and her daughter choose to make a tour in foreign lands a while, who shall prevent

them? Not your warrant, sir! Here, from this very door, they may go in broad daylight, and you yourself shall hand them into their carriage, and drive with them to Gravesend, and make your bow, and grin with the nozzle of my pistol against your cheek, while the sails belly and the shrouds tug. By God! you shall. And afterwards we will——”

Heseltine interrupted the champion drily.

“Anticipation is a luxury for your leisure, Hesse. Sir,” to the secretary, “every person under arrest has a right to see the instrument of that arrest. When it is produced, I give you my word, as a Catholic and a man of honour”—here he turned to the flaming hussar, and put a hand lightly on his shoulder—“that I will aid and support the Regent’s command, if the law approves.”

Through a half-open window to the right of the door came a peal of hysterical laughter. Not Heseltine himself could be sure whether the note was that of the older or the younger Princess. He set his teeth.

“Come, sir—the warrant.”

Inside the parlour June had bent down to whisper in the ear of the Princess of Wales, raised her gently to her feet, soothed her frenzy and bewilderment; then she went to the door and flung it wide open. Hat in hand she stood on the step, the rosy light falling on her soft young head. Her lips curved into a sly smile as she made a reverence to the three men.

“Gentlemen, the Princess of Wales wishes me to say that, as she is only here to-day for an airing, she has brought none of her household with her. Her Royal Highness, therefore, earnestly desires your company at supper in Kensington to-night.”

“What mare’s-nest is this?” said Heseltine shortly to the secretary.

“This young lady can best explain.”

“Indeed I can,” said June, assuming the defiant air of an injured person. “Mr. Frewin here told me that the Princess of Wales was in some danger, and I promised Princess Charlotte that I would go and see for myself. I went this morning, on behalf of Princess Charlotte, with Miss Knight’s permission, to inquire at Connaught House, and was surprised to find the Princess of Wales out, as Princess Charlotte had fancied that her mother was ill. This afternoon she became so restless, and was so terrified when she was told that the Regent was on his way to confer with her about her betrothal to the Prince of Orange, that I took the first coach I saw in Warwick Lane and came here. As for Princess Charlotte,

Mr. Frewin"—she made him a little mock bow—"she promised faithfully to stay where she was until my return, though she was for running off to see after her mother then and there."

"There is nothing more to be said," replied the secretary. "Pray convey my profound apologies to the Princess of Wales."

"Oh, pho! it is all right," said the Princess, who appeared in the doorway. "Of course you did your duty towards the Prince. I hope you will come to supper, Mr. Frewin."

"Your Royal Highness will graciously excuse me."

"Very well, as you choose. I do not blame you if you prefer to dine at the King's Head instead of the Brunswick Arms!"

"If only safety did not make her reckless!" murmured the Irishman, as Frewin lifted his hat and walked back to his chariot.

CHAPTER XVI

PRINCESS CHARLOTTE COMES TO HEEL

It was arranged that the Princess's carriage, after taking her to Kensington, should convey June home to Warwick House, while Heseltine and the hussar followed in the black chaise, for which a driver was found at the last moment.

Caroline of Brunswick leant back with closed eyes. The girl dared not show sympathy or give a hint of explanation, for she dreaded the Princess's probable anger more than the spite of the tricked secretary. She was afire to know what had happened at Warwick House during the three hours of her absence.

The old seneschal at Connaught House came hurrying down the steps with a wild air.

"The Princess Charlotte is here," he cried. "She came fifteen minutes ago. I sent your Royal Highness a message at once." Heseltine turned to Hesse.

"Do you hear? Go to Mr. Brougham at once and tell him to come. I myself will give notice at Carlton House on behalf of the Princess of Wales. Miss Cherier will stay here in case she is needed. Afterwards, Hesse, you had better ride to your lodgings and stay there. Madam"—he saluted his mistress—"I will return as soon as I have communicated with the Prince of Wales."

No one questioned his authority. The new development was so startling that there was nothing to do but obey.

Princess Charlotte danced down the stairs to greet her mother.

"Oh! I have run away and I shall not go back—never—never!"

"You foolish, foolish child."

"Don't you want me? I am so unhappy."

"You must go back, dearest."

"But you don't know; you haven't heard. My father has left me without a house, without any of my ladies. He came this afternoon! June knows; she saw him coming! He says I am to live at Carlton House now; and he did swear so, mother dearest, all because I said I would not go and live in Holland with the Dutchman. So, as I haven't a proper roof over my head, I ran here." She danced round the table, impishly restless, childishly joyous. "Tra-la-la! I won't go back—never, never! Look! I told them to bring up dinner. I knew you would be coming back soon, and I am so hungry."

She walked up to the cockatoo and began to tease it.

"Oh, what shall we do, Miss Cherier?" gasped the older Princess. "Lady Anne is away. Can you not persuade Princess Charlotte?"

"Let her Royal Highness have dinner now, madam, and by the time it is served Mr. Brougham will be here with Mr. Heseltine."

A carriage drove up to the door.

"I sent for Mr. Brougham myself," said Charlotte loftily.

"Pray don't imagine, any of you, that I mean to hide my intentions. I intend my father to sign an agreement, and I shall draw it up with Mr. Brougham."

The steward announced the Duke of Sussex.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Caroline.

Charlotte began to cry.

"Don't let him come in here," she flared.

"Go, Miss Cherier, and ask the Duke to wait where he is in the drawing-room. I must first take off my hat."

When June reached the hall she found two coaches at the door. Mr. Brougham leapt out of the first and waited on the steps as the second drew up. Mr. Heseltine opened the door and bowed to the Duke of York, who tumbled out grumbling. After him came Miss Knight, darting agonised glances about her.

"To the drawing-room with his Royal Highness, and ask the rest to wait in the small parlour," whispered June to a footman. Then she found herself face to face with Cornelia Knight.

"Where have you been?" said that lady sternly. "Just when you were wanted you were absent. I sent, however, for Miss Elphinstone, who returned to town just two hours ago. She is doubtless here already. It was her idea that the Princess had come here. She has influence with the Princess, and does

not encourage her in her fads, like some of her *younger* friends. Why did you stay away?"

"I went to take a message to Connaught House, and as the Princess of Wales was away I drove to Blackheath."

"Humph!" said the duenna, incredulous and indignant.

"Miss Cherier has been the means of saving a greater scandal than you imagine, madam," interposed Heseltine hastily. "And now do your best to persuade the Princess Charlotte to obey the Regent."

"The Prince is deeply angered," wept the good lady; "but my conscience is clear. A clean conscience, sir, whoever you may be, is a coat of mail. My bosom beats proudly still, even under the innuendoes and thrusts of those who are jealous of my position. I have done my duty by the Princess Charlotte, and if the Regent thinks fit to deprive me of my office, I go to my dismissal, if with anguish, yet with the knowledge that the practice of virtue will uphold me in the end, and never, sir, shall injustice or harshness force from me one word of disloyalty towards his Royal Highness or his illustrious family. He has a generous heart, and ere long he will recognise my lifelong devotion to him and his relatives."

"Madam," replied Heseltine, "you are virtue itself, and your presence here at this moment is of the utmost value. Pray find Miss Elphinstone and take her to the dining-room and ask her to join her persuasion to yours. Please come this way."

A few minutes later he returned, and found June, white and weary, at the door of a small waiting-room in the hall. He followed her in and shut the door.

"Is the Prince very angry?"

"Purple."

"Does he suspect?"

"H'm! It is impossible to say."

"Did he ask for me?"

"He asked Frewin, who was in the room. I took it upon myself to give the answer, explaining the thing as you explained it yourself to Frewin, and I told him that you had waited at Connaught House by my orders. He appeared to be satisfied. Everything is merged in his rage over the frustrating of the Orange match. The little suitor Prince has gone home. He left this afternoon, his tail between his legs."

"Are there any orders for me?"

"Only a message, asking you to arrange to sleep at your cousin's, since Warwick House is now closed." He rose abruptly and walked up to her. "Come," he said curtly,

"tell me your share in this affair. By whose authority do you dabble in these wretched intrigues?"

She could have struck him for trusting her so little; but she hung her head, remembering her confusion only two days ago.

"After what you know of my history I do not wonder that you give me credit for nothing but foolishness," she cried bitterly; "but in this you most shamefully misunderstand me. I knew not a word of this plot till to-day. I foiled it as best I could, knowing you were far away and that I could not send for you. If the hussar be a true man and not a coward, he will tell you that I knew nothing of the proposed flight till past noon to-day. And I can give you further proof. A week ago"—she looked fearlessly into his eyes—"I was summoned to the service of the Regent. You know that Mr. Frewin guesses at the secret which I have told you. I was tied hand and foot. I went to Carlton House. I received my orders—to permit no letters to pass between here and Warwick House without submitting them to the Regent. This is the first that was given to me." She put the letter into his hands. "I begged the Princess of Wales to choose some other means of sending it. She trusted me. I dared not deliver it. The seal is unbroken. Take it to her, and now let me go, for I have done all that I could. Twice I planned to tell you all this, but you were away."

A just pity came into his face.

"You are a child, and you have been called to bear a heavy burden of honour. Tell me all about this strange expedition."

She told him, and how the calumny of the secretary had startled her, hiding her face as she repeated his words about the Princess of Wales.

"So far it is well. I do not want further assurance from you," said the Irishman when she ended. "As for Hesse, he must go out of the country at once. As I told you, he is like most of the Princess of Wales's jealous friends—her greatest hindrance."

"You forget that Mr. Frewin may still put his own construction on the thing, and work out a case against her."

"He cannot."

Heseltine laid a sheet of paper before her.

"I cannot understand."

"This is an order, signed by Macmahon, to the captain of the Royal yacht *Adelaide*, to take the Princess of Wales on board off Gravesend to-night at the command of the bearer."

Again she called out for explanation.

"Do you know that history is the most monotonous thing in the wide world? History is here once more at its old tricks. The true courtier is always greedy to fulfil the dearest wish of his prince. The Regent would give his ears to be rid of his wife and marry again. The action of a servant is the key to his master's desire. And so the world goes round. Hesse used Frewin, and the Regent, winking at an elopement, gave his lieutenant free rein."

"Oh!"

She gave a little shiver and hid her face again.

"If the Regent is confronted with this order he will make it very disagreeable for Mac, and Mac will trample on Frewin. Princes do not like their schemes to be unsuccessful. The order was in Hesse's pocket; I keep it in case it is ever useful."

There was dead silence for a minute.

"Well, it is a sweet business, is it not? Who is that?" He looked into the street. "Here is the Lord Chancellor. I will come back to you——"

She heard steps and voices—a buzz of voices overhead. Her heart beat, for steps were heard coming towards the waiting-room.

A footman requested her to go to the drawing-room. She paused, dreading a blaze of lights and searching questions. The room seemed to be full of officials. The Royal Dukes she knew by their stars. One was in the further corner talking with two gentlemen, one of whom was in bishop's dress. June recognised the prince who spoke with Princess Charlotte as the Duke of Sussex. He nodded to her kindly while he bent over his niece and patted her shoulder. Under excitement he repeated his words in the fashion of his father, the babbling old King.

"Now, my dear Charlotte mustn't be naughty. Poor mother in a great dilemma—great dilemma. Mustn't stay the night here. Must come back to papa—back to papa. Carriage all ready."

"I shall stay here, Uncle Augustus."

"Tut tut! All a joke—all a joke. Shall have your own house again to-morrow."

"You know it is not a joke."

"Yes, yes—no, no. Here is one of your ladies. Ask her."

"June, don't let them take me away."

"My sweet Princess, pray consider," began a young lady, who, June knew, must be Miss Elphinstone.

"Mother!"

The Princess of Wales hurried up.

"*Gott!* What can I do?" she appealed helplessly to those present.

"Send those stupid old men away," sobbed Charlotte.

Lord Eldon looked aggrieved. The Duke of York blew his nose, grunted, beckoned the Ministers, and led the way out of the room on tiptoe. Only Mr. Brougham remained.

Charlotte stamped, and pointed to the door.

"I wish to be alone with my mother and my ladies."

"No, Charlotte," answered the other Princess firmly, "Mr. Brougham stays by my orders. Miss Cherier, call Mr. Heseltine."

Mr. Brougham watched this duel between mother and daughter from his place in the niche of the bow window that looked towards Hyde Park.

"No one can make me do anything," said Charlotte sharply

"You cannot stay here."

"If you do not want me, I might as well be dead."

Heseltine entered and stood by the closed door.

Caroline clasped and unclasped her hands, looking at him.

"Every moment that you delay, madam, you endanger the position of the Princess of Wales."

Charlotte turned and stared. She had not seen him come.

"It is true. Does your Royal Highness wish for details," he continued.

Caroline made a quick movement; then fell back, her eyes wide with alarm.

The young Princess walked slowly away to the window.

"Mr. Brougham, if I must leave here, I will not go to my father's house, but sleep at an hotel. To-morrow—to-morrow the whole of London shall know why I do this. The nation shall not only choose my husband, but it shall see that a proper residence is given to me in England where my mother may be received under my roof with honour."

"Great words, madam," bowed Mr. Brougham; "but at what cost do you seek their fulfilment? Only time, and the ultimate triumph of right over force, can give her Royal Highness, your mother, that place at Court of which she has been shamefully deprived. But the Regent is the Regent. The law of the land has elected him as paramount. You are his heir, and therefore his property in trust for the nation. If the nation rises against him, it is on the wrong side of the governing body, and the Government, in accordance with its oath of allegiance to the King and his representative, must put down such

A Lady of the Regency

insubordination with a heavy hand. You would call out your defenders? But you forget that their blood would be upon your head. Your suit cannot but fail. Your very act puts you in the wrong. To incite to insurrection is treason. However gallant your champions, they can hope for nothing but defeat. And behold what a magnificent page it will make in your Royal Highness's history! The future Sovereign of England runs away from her father's scolding—be it just or unjust—and then tells the whole pitiable story of a family quarrel to the people, fences herself in a public hotel, receives petty deputations, and incites a mob led by a few enthusiasts to march on Carlton House."

"I do not care. They may burn it down if they choose. *C'est un voluptueux. Je m'en moque.*"

Miss Knight shrieked softly, and Miss Elphinstone coughed.

"And in that event, within half an hour St. James's Park will be a solid mass of troops. Your little toy war will have subsided into nothing, while you will go meekly back, perhaps into such captivity as you have never even imagined. Is this the splendid satisfaction you have planned for yourself?"

"Is there no one—no one *man* who can help me?"

Charlotte looked fiercely round the room till her glance rested on the Irishman. For answer he pointed to the Princess of Wales, who now leant against the mantelpiece, the tears running down her cheeks. June went up to her and gently led her to a seat. Mr. Brougham drew back the curtain from the window at which he stood, and threw up the sash. Then he spoke, and his voice pierced the silence like an oracle.

"Out there is London. It is long past midnight, and the city sleeps. You can almost hear its silence." He paused. "But before the sun touches the roofs of Westminster Hall the Park will be trodden by hundreds of feet. In that vast crowd which gathers about the election of Lord Cochrane are all sorts and conditions of men, ripe for rebellion and violence. They will be at your beck and call. You have only to raise your hand and that mob will do its work. The Guards will ride out. There *must* be bloodshed. And as long as you live you will never forget, madam, that you were the deliberate cause of it."

"The nation would still do me justice."

"It is the adoration of the people which is your heaviest obligation. What right have you to make a tool of it for your private ends, madam?"

The Duke of Sussex put his head cautiously in at the door.

"Time for bed, my dear niece. Come home—come home. Horses getting cold."

Mr. Brougham spoke again. Even in her suspense June was carried away by the drama of his pose and the effect of his courteous taunts.

"See, madam, you will not have long to wait. The moon set long ago. The clouds are whiter than they were. The candles are beginning to look absurd. The sun rises in three hours." He pointed carelessly again to the view from the window. "Three hours in which to dispose your army."

Princess Charlotte retreated from the window, pressing her hands to her breast. One moment she stood so in the centre of the room motionless, and looked at no one. It seemed as if her pride and sorrow forbade her even to breathe. Slowly she raised her head at last and saw how her mother sat strained and speechless. Quietly, with her arms hanging limply by her side, she went over and placed her hands on the back of the Princess's chair. Her lips were parted. The whole room bent forward to listen, for her speech was low.

"The Regent may have command over my body, but it is not the Regent's orders that I obey, but those of my people, for whose sake I go back into captivity. And when I come into my own"—she looked at the Princess of Wales, and her hand slipped from the chair to her mother's neck—"I will——"

Her voice broke utterly. She walked away to the door, past the Dukes and the rest, without sign or greeting. But when she reached the carriage that waited, Heseltine and Mr. Brougham were there on either side to assist her into it, and Miss Knight, weeping copiously, climbed in after the Duke of Sussex, who chirruped cheerfully:

"Good child. Must have beauty sleep, you know. Good child."

CHAPTER XVII

FORTUNE IS FRIENDLY TO JUNE

LADY ADELA LUPTON, who burned with curiosity, descended upon Half Moon Street early the next morning. She was delighted to stumble upon June, and embraced her affectionately.

"Lawks! this is a pretty business. What have you been doing with your Princess?"

Lady Curragh, too wise to question June herself, tried to turn the torrent of inquiries. June adopted an attitude of comparative innocence, and so the visitor delightedly turned informant.

"You've read the *Chronicle*, of course? One of the Prince's gentlemen offered the publishers I don't know how much to suppress the story; but it was too late. The very footpads knew it before sunrise. It seems young Princy ran away down the lane, giving old Princy the slip in broad daylight—that is to say, it was not yet moonlight. And then old Princy—Ah! Molly Curragh, you needn't look at me like that, for I am an old rebel, and I can't call him anything but nicknames. Where was I? Oh! she ran away because her youngest lady-in-waiting—we all know who *that* is—wouldn't give her her hat and cloak. And then she took a common hackney coach and drove. It's my belief a certain pretty hussar"—she nudged June—"wanted to take her to the Fleet, and marry her; but anyhow she turned up safe at her mother's."

"You don't say so?" put in Heseltine, who walked in.

"It is perfectly true. Fancy you not knowing, Mr. Erin. Lord! the fuss! Lady Eldon called on me this morning and said she sat up for his lordship till two in the morning. I also know that young Princy was furious at his coming, and called him 'Old Baggs.' I'd give worlds to tell his wife."

"Have you any news for me?" June asked Heseltine under cover of this babble.

"Yes."

"Come into Molly's morning-room."

"In the first place, Dorren is safely out of trouble."

"Is the fine paid?"

"Two days ago; but it was necessary to wait for Lord Ibbs' letter."

"Where is Con?"

"At his friend's lodgings by this time. His guardian insists on his leaving London at once. He is to turn his back on Oxford."

"But he must do something."

"Exactly. Lord Ibbs intends him to go into some business at York."

"It is infamous. His training, his position, his future——"

"It is a curious whim. Let us hope it is only by way of a test."

"I must see him."

"He has to catch the coach that starts at two from the Blue Posts in Islington. He has not time to come here. He sent you a letter. Here it is."

"What has happened at Carlton House?"

"I have heard nothing more. If one could only suppress chattering like this woman upstairs!" He began to walk up and down, as he had done at Connaught House. "Well,

it is all very amusing, is it not? Warwick House is turned inside out as if it were a glove. There is not one soul left, not even a page. Miss Knight resigns; the Duchess of Leeds has been dismissed like a defaulting scullery-maid. The rest have gone their ways, and may whistle for their salaries."

Doubt and perplexity kept her dumb.

"The whole thing is in the clubs. Men are gorging and gloating over this hubbub. The Regent knows his business; so the world is entertained by the bickerings of himself and his wife. What can one do? One hand is useless." He stretched his arms wearily. "Always on the losing side, Miss Cherier, you see."

His laugh was half impatience, half sadness.

"It seems to me that you are in doubt, as I am," she faltered.

"Doubt is a very precious thing; it builds men and women; it is time gained. What do you doubt?"

"The future."

"That is every man's ghost; it should be his friend. Now a friend is a mine of discovery. Treat your future so."

She thought of her ambitions, and they seemed lean starvelings in the light of those keen Irish eyes.

"For what do you wait?"

"Anything—nothing. I have made one desperate mistake. I cannot see beyond it. Tell me—what is my duty?"

"No, that you must choose." He refused to meet her eyes.

"If love lags behind duty, then——" But his sentence was never ended; Molly Curragh ran in.

"From Buckingham House," she said. "It seems urgent."

June scanned the despatch. Her sigh was one of relief. She looked at Heseltine as she answered.

"From Colonel Goldsworthy. The Queen goes to Windsor. I am to drive down with Madame La Fite at three."

"The future is your friend so far," he answered. "Confide yourself to it."

CHAPTER XVIII

CHARLOTTE THE MECKLENBURGHER

THERE was one thing real in all the time of waiting and perplexity that was the lot of her Majesty's youngest lady between the close of that brilliant summer in London and the day when the Queen set June temporarily free to attend the Royal scapegrace, her granddaughter, after her affairs were secure.

That one thing was Charlotte the Mecklenburgher herself.

In her presence, the girl felt the old terror, mixed with a certain exhilaration, the zest of smouldering opposition.

When the Queen was frigidly kind, those about her smiled glacial smiles, with the exception of Madame Beckersdorff, who snarled, and when her Majesty gave her commands with the face of a shrew, her retinue was all chastened placidity and the Teutonic tire-woman was in her best spirits, for her people trusted the Mecklenburgher's frowns far more than her approval.

June had much ado to prevent the curl that lurked on her lips from deepening into fixed disdain. Morning after morning, when the journals arrived by the messenger that called daily in Fleet Street, she read the news aloud to the Queen. Her Majesty would have it all, without respect of politics or matter, and sometimes it was as much as the girl could do to steady her voice under those bright beady eyes, when the reviews and gazettes teemed with censures of the treatment of the young Princess Charlotte and with condemnation of the Regency. "What faith have we in promises from Carlton House?" said one gutter scribbler. "The man who lay overcome with whisky in his bride's chamber is not the man whom England trusts. A mad king is better than none. Let us have George the Farmer back again," and then followed a gross caricature of the Regent in a smock, with shock hair, grovelling in the dust and crying, "Pass the bottle," under the hoofs of a Flemish mare on which rode the King, while the Queen, as a fat peasant wife with a handkerchief tied in a wisp at one side of her head, rode pillion, and clasped her spouse round the waist, ejaculating, "Let be, gaffer, 'tis only Georgie."

June's voice ceased ere she reached the lines quoted. The picture-leaflet fluttered off her knee. She snatched at it to hide it. Her cheeks were white-hot from the coarse words she had seen. She, like many another, hated the little woman in the stiff chair by the stately windows, but some instinct forbade her to read more, and as she caught the wood-cut from the floor she quietly crushed it into a soft ball in her hand and slipped it into the pocket of her apron.

"What was that loose sheet?" came the inquiry from the window, where the thin mittened hands knotted, knotted, relentlessly and incessantly, while the knuckles of the Queen's fingers seemed gnarled and interlaced like the meshes they wove.

"Madam, it was nothing. Only a stupid print."

"Show it me."

"It is all crumpled and torn, ma'am."

"Then smooth it out."

"Ma'am, I cannot."

"What is that in your pocket? Give it me."

The Queen laid down her work, and spread out the crushed sheet. She looked at it coolly, then leaned back in her chair smiling, a bright colour in her cheeks and an elasticity about her slim, tiny figure which meant anger.

"Continue," she ordered.

"Madam, I cannot."

The gimlet eyes made indignant inquiry.

"There is much worse to come," faltered June. "Your Majesty must not see these things."

"Bring the paper here."

June obeyed, and turned away in silence.

You could have counted the great clock in the near tower sounding four three times over before the Queen spoke.

"In Germany," she said, "such scum as this rascal would be flogged first and imprisoned afterwards. The English rabble exists because here we do not use whips sufficiently. It is a pity. You may go now, but first put this filth in the fire."

June snatched up her hood and went out into the garden. The spring air, pure and sweet, was a thousand times the warmer and sweeter after the rabidness and unsavoury puerilities with which the journals drenched their public. There, inside the walls, was sordidness and jealousy, hate and dread, and crouching rapacity. Here, under the sky, were songs of birds, and joy of bursting buds, fragrance, love calling to love with the voice of the world's music. It was not intentionally that she took her way to that wicket that led down into the orchard by the mole-catcher's cottage, and she started as she found herself tripping dreamily down the bank among the drift or apple and pear flowers. Here was the very place of her probation. Here Conway had held out his arms as a last resource. "The light and the warmth, the warmth and light"—how often those words had dogged her when she was sick with loneliness and the weight of a secret! She herself had refused. Was it well? Only in her heart did she know she had done right.

She thought of her expectations and their small results, of her pride and his. She fumed at the uselessness of those passionate summer hours at Heughside, and jeered at herself bitterly for a child, taken in by a bit of tinsel.

Strangely enough, though such things prove tinsel, the

absolute radiance of such an adoration never dies. It is apart from the object, and outlives it, because it was new. The heart harks back to the unblemished sweetness of the first flower of an infatuation, and the mere memory of its freshness keeps the whole romance, however feeble its ending, precious and flawless, like a thing embalmed. And there was no shame to hide in June's case, so that her fancy could riot in sorrowful pleasure.

In no age, whether of stone or of steel, does a woman of this mould approach love clumsily. To no one could June have justified her change of front.

Again she asked herself, "Was it well?" Her fancy she could indulge in safety, far removed from any immediate necessity to surrender herself into any keeping but her own. But as she stood under the snow-petals she was sick at heart, and though spring and youth sang in her, she had not even the consolation of the girl who tosses her free arms to the sky and sighs to the breeze, "Send me a lover, dear winds, soon, right soon."

For June was hungry and surfeited at once, a wife without a wife's riches, a maid without a maid's lightness of heart, and the possessor of a secret that was neither treasure nor pleasure.

CHAPTER XIX

AN ENCOUNTER ON WEYMOUTH SANDS

ALL the parterres of Buckingham House were jewelled with pale crocuses before the betrothal of Princess Charlotte to a Prince of Saxe-Coburg was formally trumpeted, and since the little lady herself appeared tranquil and contented with his addresses, no opposition was made to her petition to visit Weymouth, especially as the great world was chiefly in Paris, and popular excitement had left Court affairs to fling itself upon the war, which the great escape from Elba had started afresh. Through the heart of Europe the apprehension of fresh carnage drove like a withering bolt. Women asked in their prayers, in a fierce wonder, whether Heaven had not yet demanded its fill of the sacrifice of the blood of their men; and men, princes and commoners alike, flung themselves doggedly into their work, like those who think to have stamped out a desperate fire of which the flames overtake them in sleep.

Thus there was no danger to be apprehended from fresh suitors who might cause the Royal filly—so Mr. Frewin

worded it—to jib at the altar itself. So to Weymouth in the first days of April, she went with joy chequered by moments of much solemnity and many emotional outbursts, both alike strangely characteristic of the young creature who, it might be, a moment later would be cutting jokes at the expense of certain august personages closely related to her.

To Weymouth by command went also June Cherie, the more glad of the release from Windsor since, by good fortune, Lord Curragh had taken a house for the watering season near the villa of the little Princess. The duties were light, for June had but to play the part of listener, while young Charlotte prattled of her future. She would hear no more legends, but had a grand air which sat quaintly upon her. At other times she would lay aside her dignity completely, and would sit at the window bowing to the loyal passers-by.

“Ah! how fine those dragoons look riding on the embankment. Look! it is low tide; let us walk on the sands.”

She consented, after much persuasion, to the escort of two ladies and an equerry. It happened well for June that he was her companion in their stroll, and not a woman who would have seen too much, and that much too quickly.

Princess Charlotte laughed heartily at the sights about her, and passed through the throng of ladies and gentlemen who flirted on the sands with the prettiest of smiles and bows.

“See there! What an elegant cavalier!” she whispered to June over her shoulder, “and how the lady on his arm ogles him!” and then she turned away to point out an acrobat to another of her ladies. The couple she had indicated were coming towards them. June was conscious of a sick, faint feeling, and the figures about her seemed one inextricable jumble of colours. The lady who hung upon the gentleman’s arm swam amid lace flouncings, and her hair was braided in fillets, in the Grecian mode. Her scarf of scarlet tinsel crêpe was the brightest spot in the crowd. She seemed to have an air of almost superfluous gentility, that travelled with her before and after like a scent of musk. Her very shadow had its unsubstantial individuality, possessed of the excessive sensibility which caused her classic tuft of ringlets to dance and her neck to bend, and palpitated in her carefully modulated voice. Her escort looked proudly down upon her and she archly up to him, and the two, no less than the extravagantly dressed stage group that followed them, were unconscious of the presence of great ones, so content were they in the sensation their own passage caused. June’s feet carried her forward a few

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steps. The couple were close to the Princess. With a haughty stare she swerved from her course, lest she should come into contact with the comedians behind them, and passed on. Involuntarily June stooped to her shoe; her one desire was to temporise.

"Nothing, only a pebble," she murmured, as she thought, to the equerry who stood between her and the sun; and, behold, the eyes she sought to avoid looked into hers! The cavalier flushed, and let his companion's hand slip from his arm. He took one or two steps forward. June stood like a stock; all her courtier's aplomb had left her.

"You are here?" said Conway, raising his hat, but not daring to ask for her hand.

"I am with the Princess."

He showed distrust.

"Did you not see her?" asked June, her anger rising at his incredulity, "she had almost to force her way past your friends."

Here the lovely lady interposed.

"Lawks! to think how rude we have been, Mr. Dorren. Let us go and make amends. Perhaps this lady will intercede."

She curtsied to June, and put a coaxing hand on Conway's arm, from which he politely extricated himself.

The girl froze harder.

"Her Royal Highness does not receive, except by order of the Queen. She is here on a holiday, and wishes her incognita strictly observed. I must follow her, but my shoe-lace slipped," she added, while her composure fled once more underneath the boy's haunting eyes.

"Let me tie it," he said, forgetting everything but gallantry and the vanity that led him to seek the approval of one woman at the expense of another.

Mrs. Flowerdew bit her lips. The equerry looked on perplexed.

Conway's fingers fumbled over the shoe-lace, while June's thoughts chased one another like storm-clouds.

"I must see you," he said, speaking low, so that the rest could not hear.

It was fortunate that her bonnet hid her ace.

"Must?"

"Yes. The Currags are here. They have a box at the theatre for to-night. I am playing."

"It is impossible."

"Then when?"

"I cannot say. I will ask Molly. Quick! quick! I must go."

He gave her instep a quick pressure as he released her sandal. With the slightest of bows to the actress, June turned and took the equerry's arm. To Conway she did not vouchsafe even a glance.

CHAPTER XX

LOVE TREMBLES IN A BALANCE

AND so the maid that had dreamt, and quailed, and longed, and dreamt again, saw her road barred by her own hand. Here at last was the limitation to June's freedom and fantasy. It was no longer a question of worlds to conquer and courts to treat with, and of all their great and little traffic, but of one person, and that person a man of no special distinction.

Even now she could not understand how it was that her dreams were run to earth, nor why, indeed, she had not been ready enough to keep the moment of decision at bay. She lashed herself again and again for the lack of cold pride that led her to draw Conway once more to her, lest her own dignity in regard to him should be too deeply impaired by his attitude towards the ladies of the stage he adored. Her self-blame was the smarter because she was aware that it was only her trampled honour as a lady and a wife that led her to sanction a formal meeting. Now, as she waited alone at the hour fixed, in a quiet parlour of Curragh's house at Weymouth, she tried to warm herself into some eagerness. Most primitive, most piteous was her state. She became once more the girl who stretches her arms to the sun and the wind, asking for the riches of love.

She turned her back to the gay sea-front and closed her lids and thought of her lover's hair, of his eyes, and dwelt upon every feature of his person and every trick of manner that had once delighted her. She thought of his strong, swift caresses, of his defiance of fate (which she too shared), of his god-like youth. And when his promises rang in her ears and then died in derisive laughter, she drowned their bitterness once more in the vision of his sheer manhood and comeliness.

She walked over to the mirror and gave an anxious touch to her necklace. As she went back to her seat, her glance rested on a lady who was passing the window. It was Mrs.

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Flowerdew. A disgust seized her. The clock tolled the hour with disagreeable insistence. Something she had overheard from the lips of the ever frank Geoffrey Trowle clung to June's thoughts. She made a supreme effort to conjure up the picture of Conway as she wished to see him. She succeeded partially. She saw once more the imploring eyes and rich brown hair that lay on the brown nape, the line of the neck and head; she felt the compelling, nervous hands. Then Mrs. Flowerdew's laugh floated up to the window, and a man's voice in answer. It was not Conway's, but the whole thing irritated her. She paced up and down the room feverishly. Certainly it was Geoffrey Trowle who had said it—and yet——

When June saw her lover in Bond Street it was June. Now it was March, and in the meanwhile that creature of furbelows and grimaces on the beach had ingratiated herself. The girl felt, rather than knew, the futile immoralities of which humanity is capable. No courtier ever existed who treads the ways of the world in the wake of the great without a consciousness of the dusty corners and the ugly ones that no Royal magnificence can cleanse or beautify. When, however, a woman, in the face of the loose daily gossip of such a Court, keeps a vigour of mind and a clean heart—a heart swift to sacrifice, slow, and often stern in judgment, and reverent towards mysteries—she escapes that taint of littleness (the beginning of vice) which is upon all men and women who peck in the dusty corners for a grain of comedy. For these persons the comedy may be as gross or as silly as you wish; it suffices the distinguished rag-pickers. A woman of reverent mind merely overhears such things. Things overheard leave blanks for mystery to fill. But mystery is, in the main, kind; she shields those who hear in spite of themselves, and reserves her punishments for the eavesdropper.

It may be modish to be so well-posted as to know what my Lady C.'s husband does not know, namely, that she has an assignation on Monday at her hairdresser's with Lord G., and that a certain captain awaits her in Fulham the day after to-morrow; but the fact that into the purse which was netted by her fair fingers for the first gallant the guineas won at euchre by the brave soldier instantly find their way, and that the lady, through the lordling's devotion, has secured a snug promotion for her lancer captain, are matters which may truly be labelled dusty. They make the stones blush, as stones will when a roofless house stands stripped of its lath and partitions. While the curious nosed among such plaster and stones, June

passed by, wondered and forgot, and did not think of scandals till suspicion gave the alarm.

That hair of Conway's, now—if another woman should have kissed it! Were it so, then June herself would as lief kiss Geoffrey Trowle's freckles as touch her husband's hand again. Indeed, she would salute them with heartiness, knowing them to be so honestly ugly, that here, at least, was unexplored country. The thought filled her with puckish glee for a moment, and served to feed her indignation anew. Then she shrugged her shoulders with disgust at the notion, and put her hands before her eyes. And even had every one of Geoff's freckles been beauty spots, and he himself an Apollo, it would not have taken away the sickness of heart which weighed her down. The clock struck again. She heard it and did not move, for it merely punctuated her misery, as if Providence were marking out an hour of special suffering into portions of aggravating symmetry. Even if she kissed the curls of another man out of defiance, it could make no difference to the intrigues of the man who owned her. She repeated that verb of possession over several times, quickly. True, she might refuse that which she had proposed herself to promise in this very hour—she might forbear, if it should be needful, to command Conway to declare his relationship towards her to his guardian and her father.

"If you command," said sweet Molly Curragh, not guessing at the inmost recesses of June's thoughts, "he cannot refuse you. Your holding back has made him waver in his purpose. There are some things which a woman must take upon herself that she may keep her place in her lover's eyes."

Command? June wondered again and again whether there would be need for that, should she give herself, in spite of resentment and suspicion, to be claimed at last.

Indignation on a supposition is wearying. She fell now into a pensive mood. Fancy urged the picture of a hot-headed, Vesuvian youth—a lover—despoiled of his adoration, beguiled by another object, which after all he found to be nothing but husks and straw. Fancy quickened this picture, and showed the youth as starving for true love, but making light of it, tossed hither and thither, not by vice but by mere idleness, a tool of others less guileless than himself. Then, forsaking the husks, he would turn once more hungrily to his one true adoration, and beg to be taken back into heaven.

Such a picture softens nine women out of ten, so absurdly easily are they appeased. June was one of the nine too, but

her nature was revolutionary. The same defiance that had suggested endearments to Geoffrey Trowle or any other as a counterblast, gave her only contempt for a man who could professedly starve for love without making efforts towards relief. Wherefore she banished that picture of a pitiful youth, for it did not suit her case.

Again, custom and convention urged gentleness. She pondered steadily on the being and doing of a man and his attitude towards the world. She reflected on the right of a man to looseness. She assured herself bravely that it was sanctioned by time, and must therefore be a part of the universal scheme, just as his simpler dress, his rougher gloves, and his licence of expression separated him from her. And yet, if the looseness, like the gloves and the oaths, was merely a matter of utility, where do the divine emotions enter, and at what precise line in a man's transgressions does heaven cease to wink? For heaven is surely invoked in every intrigue.

Over these things, while aware only of half facts and surrounded with mystery, June knitted her straight brows so long that Providence ticked off another fifteen minutes. This time the sense of delay enraged rather than sickened her. She stamped her foot and began to gather up her scarf, fiercely resolved to wait no more.

Then a voice and a step outside made her tremble from head to foot. She had meant to leave with dignity. Now her exit would only have the appearance of an escape. She could not even hide now, but must be found, indecorously first at the tryst, weary of waiting, sick in spirit. She took the only seat which had its back to the light. She was glad that the flunkey had been dismissed at the foot of the stairs.

Conway entered with an air of reverential conquest, if you can imagine such a condition. That is to say he neither swung into the room nor hurried in, but closed the door punctiliously and strode to his lady with deliberation, making as if he would take her in his arms without protest. But he stopped a few paces short, let his arms fall a little tragically, and uttered her name.

"I was nearly going."

It was not at all what she had intended to say, and the anger she had meant to put into it merely amounted to curtness. He immediately tried to soothe her, for he mistook her mood for mere irritability.

"My sweet one, I could flog myself, but my friends were most anxious I should give them advice on a ticklish episode in the dialogue of my comedy."

He tried to kiss her hand as it lay cold and impassive on her knee ; but he could not reach it in time, for she put it nervously up to feel if her hair was loose.

"You should have stayed to finish the discussion."

He could not see that her eyes flashed in anger, but her impatience frightened him. He drew up a seat opposite.

"It was, believe me, important, and when it is a matter of creation—I—they——. Oh ! you can't understand, sweetheart, what it means to me."

"Am I suddenly grown stupid ? I did not imagine that you stayed till the clock hands had gone a whole round without your own private reasons. But these do not matter now. We meet to-day, and you are here. Can you tell me what it is you have to say, that we may settle our affairs quickly ?"

She felt her advantage and leant back, smoothing her mittens.

This deep anger Conway had not expected. He had looked for tears, which he would have much joy in quenching, for reproaches, which he would combat by kisses, for airs and graces, which would only give him a chance for proving humble, irresistible, and victorious all at once. But to be a graduate in the school of Mrs. Flowerdew does not give a man the intuition which he lacks by nature.

"What ails you, dearest ?" he said eagerly.

June laughed bitterly.

"Nothing. I am tired of cooling my heels on your account."

"But now that I am here——"

"You have even no sorrow for your lack of manners."

"Now you call me an oaf, and as an oaf you must expect me to woo you all over again." His tone was light. He fell back into the manner of the actor-poet. "Say, sweetheart, how shall I do it ? Shall I dance to you in clogs, and sing to you on a wind reed ? I have songs in my wallet for you, written with you for their pivot. Shall they be tragic or only melancholy ? No, no tragedy for you, my white princess, only moonlike melancholy. But if you will, I can be dumb, as dumb as Thisbe's tomb. Ah ! your eyes can look tenderness, for I have seen it there. And your lips ? And your breast, where pity lies padlocked and your lover's slumbers knock in vain, falling back broken-winged ? Oh ! your breast heaves, you tremble and suffocate. These are tears, precious pearls over my transgressions, my neglect, my foolish ambitions. Divine indeed is grief that——"

June repulsed him quickly, pushed back her hair and turned away, her shoulders convulsively rising. Longer than that she

could not hide her scorn and disillusion. They rang out in a peal of brilliant derision.

She had asked for a staff, and instead it was an impeding tendril which clung to her. She hungered for truth and virility, and instead received bombast and the addresses of a rhymester who was deep in love with his own shadow.

She walked to and fro, laughing, laughing. And her lover, while he hung his head, tore in pieces one of the verses he flattered himself would win her admiration, and quivered under what seemed to him an affront of Fate itself.

June flung herself exhausted on a settee at last. Her eyes shone, her lips trembled, her frame shook. The tension of three-quarters of an hour's delay had been heavy. The things that she had been prepared to say were sadly jumbled. The smooth course of the meeting she had pictured, in which the true heroism of the boy should redeem her in his eyes as a man, was all turned to tempest and wreck. There was a silence in the room. Then Conway, fidgeting between the settee and the window, said :

"I am sorry to have been ridiculous ; I am grieved to be late. That, at least, you can forget now."

"Forget?" she murmured. "To have so little care for the woman whom you led into folly as to come late to a meeting which must decide your life and hers, and then to ask her to forget! Truly I have spoilt you. You may well say to yourself, 'There are many other things which are harder to forget, and she has forgotten them.' It is true that I have pretended to forget, for peace' sake. But have I no memory, have I no eyes and ears to see you as you pass flaunting in the face of decency, running after any adventuress, robbed by every man with an ounce of brains? Can I not hear the things that are said of you to me? Oh! God knows that I care not where you are, nor what you do, from one Christmas to another, if these tale-tellers of your nonsense and your silly love affairs would only be silent before me. You are a man." She seated herself and folded her arms. "Is it not a fine thing to be a man? To drink, to leer, to spout rhymes with the trace of a hiccough in your voice, to swing your arms, to posture, to say all manner of extravagant things in any way that takes your fancy, so that every one may cry, 'The splendid rake. What an eye he has, and what a leg, too!' Confess, Conway, 'tis a portrait that would do Smithfield honour."

The loser is always artful. Conway stepped backwards in admiration.

"Oh! June, what a Lady Betty you would make! You and I, in Cibber's frame. 'Tis a daring idea. You need no teaching. The Bellamy herself could never have had that tone in your voice nor your facial play. Scold like that for ever if you would hold me, heart and brain, enslaved."

The was another dead silence. Then June moved resolutely across the room and stood by her husband.

"You have more cunning than I thought," she said quietly. "Let us come to our business. You thought—that is, I said——"

The moment rushed upon her in its full nakedness. She sought piteously for words.

"What need to beat about the bush," said Conway ardently, while he knelt down beside her. "You are my wife once and for all. It is enough."

"No, it is not enough."

"No, no! Oh! now you speak the truth; it is not enough."

He possessed himself of her hand and kissed it without ceasing. June was keenly conscious that she looked on with some curiosity, as if the hand had been the hand of another woman.

"Our meeting——" she began coldly, trying at the same time to free her hand.

"You are my wife. All the world shall know you before the sun is a day older."

"That it shall not. The world shall know nothing unless I choose."

"June, you are a weather-cock. Just now you said——"

"You choose to understand me wrongly. See here, I will make clear to you what I feel, and then if you are a man you will be manly and merciful, and if you are not, God help you, for you will have killed not only my love for you, but all my life and hope. Sit there. I will speak to you without hiding one thing—but you must not see my face."

"I may at least hold your hand?"

"If it gives you any pleasure."

She began her confession in a low voice that gained in steadiness.

"Since the day that you came to Windsor and so surprised me I have been learning many things about love and ourselves, and our bodies and souls. I have been terribly puzzled, but there was no one who could help me, for I dared not speak openly. You have bitterly accused me of delaying your love, of repulsing it. Search in your own heart, and ask whether you have not also delayed. A man's part in all this seems

to me wondrously simple. You had only to confess your debts to Lord Ibbs, and your love and our rashness——”

“*Our* love, June,” he pleaded.

She continued without heeding him.

“And the difficulty would have been faced once for all. For me there was much to consider. I—I am a woman, and have thought——” She was silent, then resumed hurriedly: “Vows taken so lightly are strangely binding. It seemed to me that we had thrust our lives together rudely, and that happiness could not be earned so.”

“Where there is love——”

“Hush! You make it hard for me to speak. I could not do except what I did. I was put by Fate where you could not see me. I tell you now that I was glad of it, for a hundred reasons. I hoped that the days and the months would ripen my knowledge, and lead me to understand how happiness could be won. It seems to me, a woman, a very precious thing, this happiness. When you kissed me first I seemed to possess it. No, Con, not now; wait and hear me. I waited and hoped, and my hope rested on my hopes and my pride for you. Since you have broken my pride in you I have felt only misery; and now I know that I have never loved, for when my pride in you was gone, my love was gone also. You kissed my hand just now. You might have been a stranger; there is no warmth in my pulse when your lips touch my wrist, and my heart—it does not hurry. Surely, this being so, it is plain that kissing and lovers’ nonsense can no more be ours. Wait”——she put up a restraining hand once more. “How, then, can you call me wife except in name? A man who does so insults himself. Oh! I am so sick and weary of these thoughts all these long months, and weary most of all at not knowing the issue of the waiting. But to-day decides it. We cannot help ourselves. You are not unhappy, therefore let everything be well as it is. The youth and joy in you may find, perhaps, a new object.” The disdain came back to her voice. “But since I am your wife I have a right to ask that you have for your friends creatures of finer blood than the player lady who hangs to your arm like a love-knot.”

“You speak of your pride,” said the boy angrily, “and yet you would have had me perpetually a hide-away. Is it for that I married you? Hang it! Once more, am I flesh and blood or no?”

“Enough of both, it seems.”

“God! what do you want of me? Tell me that, at any rate, and now you shall look me in the face.”

"That I will; but you need not hold me by the wrist. I want help, counsel, a friend, a man who can take action, who can keep his eye clear and his heart single, whose body and soul are as true to me as his sword to the King. I want—oh!—strong arms, a strong heart, a strong brain—I want a man, I tell you. I want to be taken into his heart, and I will take his head in my arms so that I can kiss the pride in his face."

"Tell me—am I the man?"

She did not answer; she evaded his eyes, and looked blankly at the scene through the half-screened window. The street was full of people. A cavalry regiment under orders for Holland caracolled past them in full trot, headed by its band. There were cheers and songs. The noise made the silence in the room the more grievous.

"You have not answered me, dear."

Still she did not move. He held out his arms with all the persuasion he could summon.

It would be very easy, she thought, as she scanned the position rapidly. Here was safe haven and a certain placidity. The path was beaten. Molly would approve, and shelter her till Lord Ibbs had spent his anger. The debts? Some one would pay them. The Queen? She must be approached carefully. It was all so easy, so plain.

Conway moved towards her. On his watch-chain was a miniature—a strange woman's face. It jarred upon the girl. She turned aside.

"Take my brow and kiss back the pride you once saw there," he said imploringly.

There were voices close outside, and his lordship's laugh. June started.

"No, no," she gasped, in retreat; "not now."

She passed so swiftly out of the room and the house that Curragh himself scarcely knew that they had met on the stairs.

So the delay of thrice fifteen minutes brought tragedy.

CHAPTER XXI

CONWAY ACCEPTS JUNE'S CHALLENGE

FUTILITY was written upon everything for the rest of that day. June's attendance at the Royal villa kept her perpetually busy from the moment she had taken flight and thrust destiny from her. The next spring morning rose calm and soft. The wind was warm, the sea was all lapis-lazuli, the beach swarmed with

the medley of folk that so delighted her Princess. Actors and soldiers, seamen and townsfolk, beaux and belles, zanies and performing dogs, musicians and sugar-sellers—all were there. June dared not face it. Her head throbbed, and she made it a pretext for staying at home, for she hoped to slip round to ask Molly's counsel. Ere she was sure that the coast was clear she received a note from her cousin:

"I have news for you. Whether it will please you or not I cannot say. Conway wishes to see you at once. There is very little time. Come (making my indisposition the excuse to the Princess) as soon as you receive this."

"Very little time" for what? Her nervous state led her to anticipate an escapade which had landed her vainglorious husband in some equivocal position which necessitated immediate flight. Her steps were shod with resentment that she should so be at his beck and call. And yet Molly herself had written.

Molly watched for her arrival, and drew her aside quickly into a little room. June looked surprised.

"I am glad he is not here," she said with an air of relief, giving Molly a hug. "Men are always late at such times, are they not, Cousin Molly? Yesterday I waited nearly an hour for that ungallant——"

Something in Lady Curragh's face cut June's words short.

"He is here already, and busy with Geoffrey. I said that I would send to him when you came—that is, if you wish to see him."

"With Geoffrey?"

"Yes."

"Then there is no great haste. Can I not talk to you? I want to tell you about yesterday."

"I know it already."

"Well?"

Molly looked pityingly down upon the girl, whose eyes fell.

"Oh, if I could have things as I would for you, child! But I cannot. You must fight your own way through it all, for you took your own course early, and have the most wonderful power of concealment, for a girl. Do not think I am going to blame you. I did not blame you when you confessed this matter to me, and I do not blame you now for what happened yesterday. You have made demands that some women might consider as excessive and extraordinary, when the whole circumstances and the character of the man to whom you are

married are taken into account. I do not think those demands too much; but then I buried all these notions even before my boy was born. I told myself they were foolish expectations. You were hurried into a gigantic error; but you have taken care not to make a worse. Certainly you have been stern. Let me look at you. Yes, I think you have been hard, and were probably hard yesterday at that interview which led to nothing. Yet it has had result, and one you will not guess—you have made a man of this boy; you have removed him from temptation, and Geoff poses as the guardian angel."

"But Geoffrey? How?"

"See here. I thought you would need preparation; that you might be full of distress, with a revulsion of feeling, if I told you bluntly that your lover goes, at least temporarily, out of your life. Is it what you wish?"

The assent was somewhat feeble.

"You can keep him if you wish."

"No, no."

The reply came quickly.

"Then come and bid good-bye, and be gentle, for he goes to Bedford for his soldier's training, and to-night he and Geoffrey take their papers to be signed at the Portman Barracks. The stage starts for London in half an hour."

"Why did he not tell me?" cried June half angrily.

"Because you showed him so plainly that you did not need him. Come, show yourself a woman. Do not be stern and soft alternately. The thing is not all your doing. Be glad that the lover has done with play and is setting to work, and all for you."

"He is going to serve under the Duke?"

"He has bought a commission with his last penny. It is the very thing for him. He will come back eased of much of his superabundant emotion, less of a scribbler, broader in shoulders, simpler, less sure of himself. Geoff and he have begun to knock each other over already. I will go and call him."

When the door closed once more and shut in the two who were so strangely bound, June felt instantly that the tables of yesterday were turned. She was powerless. Conway's action disarmed all censure. He was, perhaps, destined to go into a strange land, to fever and to bullets, into the very eye of the war which the Duke had sworn to bring to a crisis without waste of time. The boy was little fitted for hardship or for protracted marching and action. She trembled and leant over the back of a chair, and buried her face in her hands. He entered and stood by her silently.

"I want you to help me," he said bravely. "Lady Curragh has told you where I am going, and why? I want you to forget that I understood you so poorly yesterday. You cannot kiss back the pride which you say is gone from me; but blood may do what love is too weak to do. If I cannot come home to you as the man to whose arms you will give yourself, I can at least return as a soldier whom you will not be ashamed to love as a friend. I go, knowing that you are well cared for and happy. That is so?"

"Indeed, I do not know: I am so weary, so puzzled"; and she began to cry like a tired child.

CHAPTER XXII

CONWAY MAKES NOBLE AMENDS

It was well, perhaps, for her lady in waiting that Her Royal Wilfulness grew tired of the sea, and insisted on returning to London earlier than had been arranged. The days of April glided into those of May. London was full of loud patriotism, and the recruiting sergeants were as busy and as drunk as they had ever been in the memory of man.

Conway wrote from Bedford exultingly of the increase of his chest and the surprising accuracy of his shooting, of the dullness of the Fen township and the glorious asceticism of the soldier's life. He and Geoffrey came to London but once in that time of fierce preparation for battle, and then it was with eyes full of that thirst of blood which comes upon men before action, like a fiery baptism. They were of the chosen. Somehow they had contrived it, and both found themselves under orders for Holland with a detachment of Guards under Sir Thomas Picton. The elder man drowned his joy in "pottle-deep potations" at the clubs that night, and the younger sat apart in a kind of reverent stupor at the honour done to him, and gazed long upon his new sword ere he went to the house in Half Moon Street before the start at dawn for Dover. It was a simple, unemphatic leave-taking. "Swords are foolish things," June said through her tears, and made no attempt now to keep his hands off her. Then there came before her Mr. Heseltine's words, and all that scene in the picture-gallery of the Irish house. In the moment of parting the great and little events are levelled so much that the mind dwells no longer on a heart sorrow than it does on the colour of a

tassel. The tassel, indeed, proves by far the more insistent. June, who lay rather than leant on the chair, with her head on her husband's shoulder, stared into his eyes blankly, seeing all the time the figure of a man who turned a flashing blade in his hand, while a fine powder from the burnishing cloth danced in golden atoms in the shaft of sun that painted on the oaken floor the distorted figure of that ancestress who had loved her King too faithfully for her own peace. Looking back upon that parting—as June did daily from that moment—she remembered only a confusion of words, a blankness of thought, a numbness of feeling; but she remembered that Conway had laughed and that the laugh rang true, and this much gave her comfort.



No news of any decisive nature was expected for ten days. Still, the London gazettes were busy, for there were always canards to explode when no positive information could be had.

June knew that the world was changed. Her compact was now to be faced. She was assured that Conway would not be eventually denied, and she came to regard herself in the unromantic light of a person whose destiny leaves no doubt and affords no vistas. Her wild dreams of distinction laid aside, she tried to guide her thoughts into the channel of those whose romances are accomplished. She foolishly thought that all life and youth were merged in that comfortable greyness which was the delight of creatures who only saw to the end of their knotting-needle or the embroidered leading-strings of their firstborn. At the same time she could not be selfishly absorbed—the national crisis was too overwhelming; and though her alarm for Conway did not at first become acute, she watched the news and prayed—though in a half-rebellious fashion, it is true—wondering all the while at the poetic justice in his method of rehabilitating himself in her eyes—a method which cost her as much distress as it mulcted him of pains and exacted from him privation. At the same time there came about an event which momentarily helped her to be lenient towards her fate. Lord Ibbs, saturated with dropsy and so incoherent with oaths that his lawyer could scarce get him to speak his orders, died. Had he been a man of no title, the letter announcing his demise to his heir might have lain many days unopened at a lodging in Magdalen College; but his London man of business—for Lord Ibbs had the right, not only to certain export duties in the Cornish fishing town on his

estate, but a royalty from valuable mines—made the news the excuse for an idle morning at one of the Press coffee-houses. Thus the *Chronicle* and the *Gazette* published the event within two days with full biographical comment, followed by a flattering paragraph on his lordship's successor, whom they described as "a young man of great parts, already distinguished in literature, and, from the showing of his talents, a future star in the galaxy that moves about Mr. Canning." The two accounts ran almost parallel, and pointed to the prompting of the same intimate and perfervid style of the same scribbler, except that in the *Gazette* the penny-a-liner was careful to insert Lord Grey's name in place of the other.

There were so few social events of note, and people were already so sick of puzzling over the true history of Princess Charlotte's *congé* to her first suitor, that the succession of a gay and eligible peer caused quite a chatter. After the first shock of decent gladness on her husband's behalf, mingled with a sudden terror lest the importance of the gossip to her should show in her face, June acquired a certain honest pride of her future position, and was all the prouder of it since she had for some time past judged herself doomed for ever to be a livelong waif and a hanger-on of the fringes of importance. This pride, which was natural and honest, helped her to play her part in the general comedy during the six days in which all London waited for great news. She heard the will of Lord Ibbs discussed a hundred times, and learnt more about Conway's patrimony from the lips of an Alvanley than Conway could ever have told her. It afforded her great entertainment to discuss his future wife with all the old reps, and to affect great innocence when they winked and chuckled and told one another across her that the young man had gone the pace but would come to reason with the weight of a township and the third of a province on his shoulders. With the younger matrons and those ardent misses who had not received the right offers that season, she was held in vast respect as a person who had known Conway well. She described him prettily, lingering on his height, his extravagance, his keenness in sport, his love of the classics. Most of her listeners instantly conceived a violent jealousy against her, and told each other that she patronised them and had more than an eye upon the Ibbs heirlooms. "But then," wisely urged one, "you know she was brought up with him. They played together over their toys. There is not much romance in these beginnings, and a man's thoughts do not turn inwards like the toes of a

cavalry soldier; they go out to fresh hearts as soon as he begins to think of marriage."

In her heart June laughed at these inquisitive creatures, and shut herself in her rooms at Lady Curragh's with a kind of dull determination to do penance for so allowing herself to trifle in anything concerning the man who had put himself to the ordeal by fire and thirst and blood. The contrast of these things with the silly talk of Mayfair gave her a great loathing. In twelve hours she was wondering at the June of the preceding three days. She grew whiter as the hours rolled on. Her imagination having only suspense to feed it, made her afraid of every letter that came, and every dusty postilion who clattered down the highways. Curragh, who rolled round daily to St. James's from his house in Half Moon Street, came back one morning fiercely incoherent. A certain cousin of his—an Irish "cousin," be it understood—was among the volunteers, and had come home from the Netherlands with a bad cut. They had been fêting him at Brooks's. But the things he had told his friends left a bad taste in the mouth, and Curragh, when he once got a thing into his dense head, could think of nothing else, until even his wife wished that some kind deity would knock him senseless for an hour or two, and leave his pate empty for another idea of a more interesting nature. As no Herculean force offered its services, his lordship rambled on, carefully stuffing the corner of that coroneted handkerchief his friends knew so well into his pocket, in order that he might pull it out again, an action which cannot at this date be ascribed to vulgarity, for it had now become with him a nervous trick.

"A disgusting butchery," he mumbled. "Damme! every surgeon in the place should be shot. Better to bleed to death in the clean sand of a trench than to be piloted from a sore into a gangrene, into a heaven knows what of corruption, and all for the lack of a little sobriety and cleanliness. A drunken surgeon under the Duke's very eye! Gad! it's worse than ever so many 'Bonies' to one man, though the French are enough to turn one's liver the colour of St. Pathrick's flag by the way they hit a man when he is down. There was Mulholland—Tim Mulholland of the Fusiliers—you know him, Molly—Tim. God! there's a life gone, and he not thirty! Do you remember his eye, Molly? Do you know what the skin-cold, white-livered frog of a Consul's scouts did to his eyes when he was caught by the outposts outside Brussels, reconnoitring for the Duke? Fixed the lids open, they did, and

Brady—my cousin Brady—saw it—fixed the lids open and then, what do you think? Hot irons were not quick enough for them—too merciful—”

The desired force, though scarcely supernatural, here interfered, but in shutting Curragh's mouth it struck to the ground June, who had been listening behind him, wide eyed with such horror as she had never known.

“You fool, you purblind fool!” was all that her ladyship could say, with flashing eyes, as she made him lift the girl up and fetch a cordial.

“She has had too much junketing,” said Curragh, with sympathetic patronage; “not enough rest, Molly. I'll ring for the maid.”

His wife caught him by the wrist.

“See here,” she said sternly—“keep these brutalities of war to yourself. Do you think women have not ten thousand times more vision than a man? Can you never learn that if you dwell an instant upon a scratch, a woman's mind conjures up the possibility of a gaping scar so vividly that she can see its ragged edges? Do you not realise that this child's—playmate—is in the track of these horrors? That should be enough for you; but I must tell you more, since it is the only way to keep your mouth closed before her. He is her lover.”

“I am not such a dunderhead,” grumbled her spouse. “I had guessed that at Weymouth, what with all your winks and jogs, and the interview in your ladyship's parlour.”

She looked at him as she chafed June's hands and sprinkled her temples.

“Well, he is more than that. He is her husband. They are married children, separated it is true, but still, in the eyes not only of the law, but of God, they are man and wife. Keep your mouth shut. It will be good practice for you, and I think it will be best if you stay indoors for fear you should be tempted to collect more brutalities. Remember, this is not your secret, but June's. If the crisis in Holland comes within a week, as they say it will, you will—God help us!—not have to keep silent long. Look, you had better go; she stirs!”

Curragh, making prodigious efforts to walk on tiptoe, stole away, wagging his head in bewilderment, and mingling wonder with admiration.

“Women! Who'd have thought so much? Up her sleeve, too! A man of such prospects! And my wife and the girl calmly listening to the tittle-tattle and knowing all the while

where the lad had hung his hat. Women's vision! Bless them, they are furnished with as many optics as the creatures in Revelation. Indeed, they themselves are revelation. My wife now! She spoke to me as if I were dirt, after deliberately keeping me in ignorance. How the devil is a fellow to see when a woman bandages his eyes continually?"—and he reflected—like many men in like case—by way of proud consolation, that a man possessed of an unusually clever wife was certainly placed at a deuced disadvantage.

From the hour in which June came to herself in bewilderment after her swoon, she saw nothing, heard nothing, but the sounds and sights of carnage. She was evidently physically ill, and her cousin treated her as an invalid, but tried to coax her out to the great ball in St. James's Square, at which Mrs. Boehm's friends were to meet the Prince of Wales. It was the last ball of the lingering season, and the hostess had planned for it such brilliance that Lord Alvanley was collecting statistics of the expenditure in candles and garlands and the wages of *chefs* for the benefit of rival hostesses. People were sick of waiting for war news. All but those who numbered their dearest among the troops in Brussels, turned to a superfine frolic such as the ball in question with a kind of selfish philosophy.

"As we cannot be in the trenches," they argued, "we may as well be dry shod and lightly shod, and eating well and frisking heartily."

June refused all persuasion to be present, though even Curragh tried to clinch the matter with a rough attempt at authority. It was with an aching heart that his wife, in her bravest fineries, left the girl at home in the quiet house. But June loved the silence; it comforted her. Against the background of the dark, moonless summer sky, she could think more intently of Conway. All her woman's tenderness—exquisite, unstinted—welled forth. She could have cut her tongue out for the use of that word "pride" to him at their last meeting. What, after all, is pride, when it is a question of a life in danger and a human soul put through a furnace? In imagination she was wet and stiff with the mist of the Flat Countries, and sick with the vermin and the mud of those camps, and the smell of blood, till she fell asleep from exhaustion. There followed a dream of such nameless terror, that to wake up from it to a consciousness of sweet aromatic odours and gentle rustling was like the kiss of God on the forehead of a man whose one foot still dangles in hell.

Lady Curragh shaded the light and looked down on her cousin. June's eyes opened slowly.

"Are you not gone to Mrs. Boehm's yet?" she asked confusedly.

"Gone? Yes, and returned."

Molly Curragh tried to laugh, but could not. June saw that her cheeks had not their wonted delicate colour.

"How tired you are," she said, rousing herself and sitting up among her pillows. "I believe you have danced yourself weary."

Lady Curragh turned away her head for a moment, and went to the window to pull up the curtain. She threw up the sash also, and leant out apprehensively.

"You have heard nothing?" she asked, quickly turning.

"Nothing. How strange you are!"

Lady Curragh seemed to be listening again. There was a distant roar, and a sound of wheels quickly passing in succession.

June sprang up.

"There is news," she cried. "Tell me."

She seized Lady Curragh's hands and sank trembling on her knees.

Then Molly, holding her cousin's hands tightly, began to speak fast, as she had spoken that autumn evening at Castle Curragh, when she told of Squire Cherier's bankruptcy. And there followed that great story of the news of Waterloo—how the French eagles fluttered from the splashed and splintered chaise that drove up to Mrs. Boehm's, and how Alvanley was the first to get wind of it; and then how a hush fell upon that jewelled assembly when the Prince appeared uncovered in the doorway, with tears in his eyes, to speak in a breath of the crowned valour of England and the loss of many friends, and how the moment was too solemn for cheers or ejaculation, while men and women, without words, clasped the hands of those who stood near, like children lost in a great forest.

"Curragh is gone straight to my lord Castlereagh to know if the lists are out. The whole of St. James's is wide awake—nay, all London. I entreat you to stay where you are—to rest."

June flung her one look, that said, "Sleep! who can sleep?" and began to dress herself swiftly. They sat and waited, and it was not long before they heard Curragh calling in a loud whisper, and rapping at his wife's room. Both women started up. The elder gained the door first, and put the other back almost sternly.

"It is my right," gasped June.

"Dear one, good news will keep."

She closed the door after her, and June went back to her window and waited, deaf and dumb and paralysed. In that hour she would have given the power of sight for the rest of her life for the fragment of a sound of joy or reassurance from the foot of the stairs, where Molly and her husband spoke so low. There came none. When Molly slipped softly back, June faced her. There was no need for speech. For half an hour June neither moved nor spoke nor answered the tears that shook her tender cousin. Then she stretched her arms out as if in a great access of fatigue, and whispered to Molly, "I'll stay here." She slipped down on to the floor by her cousin's knee crying "Don't leave me."

So they sat—a great lady in her jewels and brocade, with pride on her brow and the sorrow of all the world in her eyes; and across her knees a pale girl whose dark hair mercifully hid her face, till the splendid sun made the lady's diamonds blush, and danced among June's tresses.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FAREWELL TO WINDSOR

IN the confusion and dismay of the succeeding hours it was easy to conceal a sorrow that might have led to suspicion. Indeed the death of a childhood's comrade—and one, too, so gallant as Conway, and so manifestly destined for a brilliant future—was reason enough to justify June in her retirement, should it have been called in question during the general jubilation. Until the noon of the day following that night of ghastliness she had not dared ask a question. Until she asked, Molly Curragh had not dared to touch on any detail. The first news came through a rough scrawl from Geoffrey, himself badly scored on the head and thigh, and the note came by the hands of those who swung Buonaparte's eagles out of the Dover chaise. June asked to see the scrawl. It was brief and characteristic, and addressed to Curragh:—

"OULD BALLY,—

"We've beat them, and sorry a bit of quarter they got. The Lord knows which of us still remains. The boy—God help us!—is gone; a bullet clean in the chest and in a main artery—died in my arms. A pretty fellow, full of go, and never flinched. A clean wound, I tell you, and all over almost

A Lady of the Regency

before you could wink thrice. Tell his colleen that I've got his ring and a letter, and I'll be back with them the moment I'm out of this fever-hole. The dirty devils have made a rare mess of me, but I've got one side whole. Percy takes this. Tell Denis he's well out of it, the fat loon. G."

And so there remained nothing for it but to wait with folded hands till Geoffrey was well enough to stand the journey, and give the fuller news that June so dreaded. White and inarticulate as a shadow, she sat in a curtained room, only content when Lady Curragh's arms were about her. For four days she scarcely spoke, except to answer by a word or two Molly's solicitude. Once—it was the fourth day after the tidings—she pulled her cousin's face down to her.

"Did he know," she whispered, "that—that—his heritage——?"

"Yes, yes. The letter in which you told him of it, enclosing the slip from the *Gazette*, could not but have reached him on the morning of the day before——"

"Thank heaven!"

Even as she said it she met Molly's look, and the colour rushed into her face. She put up her hand imploringly.

"No, no, not that; I was glad for his sake. Oh! you do not think I could be so vile as to spend one thought on his heritage for myself. I would not touch it, and no one shall know."

"My child, such things never entered my head. If I thought of it for a moment, it was in the hope that indirectly the fact that Conway knew of his succession to the title should help you. But until the letter comes we cannot say. We do not even know whether his—wife has a right to the lands, for the deeds are all sealed up and waiting. It seems there is no heir, so that if Con made no statement, the Crown intervenes."

"To be silent is easy," said June; "it is the last service I can render him."

When the point came up again, Molly, full of kindly wisdom, tried to persuade the girl that to take upon herself the position due to her would be to silence all opposition that could arise.

"But the secret is my own," said June; "it is a sad secret, but not a bad one. It is my own to keep, and hurts no one."

"Except if at any future time——" Molly interrupted herself hurriedly. "No, no. There is no need, perhaps. But

since there is nothing dishonourable, is it not surer and safer to be open? You could, at any rate, do your father a service if the wealth——”

But June put up a beseeching face to be kissed, and Molly, silenced, went away to scold her lord and master for kicking his heels in the fencing saloons instead of attending in the House for the Seditious Meetings Bill.

Now it so happened that Curragh was on this occasion distinctly aggrieved, for he had yawned for exactly four hours in the chair at a committee, to the purposes of which he was as remotely allied as the man in the moon. So he merely sulked, called his curricie, and instantly drove off to spend a morning at the clubs. His tongue loosened by more news of Waterloo and some curaçoa at Wattier's, he went on to Brooks's, and, since he was the biggest gun present, he stood on the hearth-mat and gave opinions on the war, with many Celtic interjections. Discovered here by a boon companion, he threw in his fortunes with this gentleman and rolled in to White's. Here Alvanley, with Major Henry Percy in tow, was spreading himself like a peacock, and while content to take a minor rôle so long as his man was the centre of admiration and excitement, looked about him for butts for his own wit. At an evil moment his eye fell upon Curragh, who came in with somewhat unnecessary uproar.

The wit turned to ask an introduction of Mr. Edward Frewin, who chanced to stand near, and who, on his way to offer his condolences to Miss Cherier on the death of her father's young friend, had turned into White's to hear the latest. The secretary foresaw a comfortable space of courtship, in which he should reverently lead the girl's thoughts from a natural grief and turn them to himself—a man, look you, in the eye of the world, in the circle of the Regent, and an expert in love, having practised his powers on lesser divinities ever since he began to think about the set of his white stock underneath his pale face.

Lord Alvanley bowed with extravagance on the introduction to Curragh, who advanced bluntly and shook the other's hand with merciless geniality. Alvanley affected to blanch and faint.

“Hartshorn, some one,” he cried. “Your Alvanley has encountered a giant.”

“Tut, sir!” cried Curragh, not knowing whether to be angry or not.

“It is true,” said Alvanley solemnly. “Percy, you left the best blood behind you and took weaklings.”

"That he has not," bellowed Curragh, "for my brother Geoffrey is out there, blacked all over, and carved in a pattern by the French, like a bit of bog oak. You should see him lift a one-year-old on his shoulders before you damn him as a weakling; and I should have gone too, except for her ladyship. 'Tis far better to be carved up than swelter here over matters of law which have no more to do with the Constitution of England than a flea has to do with an elephant. Why in conscience they let some of the men go out I can't say." He turned upon Stuart. "There's Rufford, sir—Rufford—a consequential young fellow that always has the air of living as if a reporter followed at his heels to say how he looks when he does this or that. Why did you send that youngster? And then the boy that went with Geoffrey—there's a waste of youth and ardour through rashness and love. Wanted his spurs to hang round the girl's neck, I suppose, poor young fool."

"I do not know to whom you allude, sir," said Major Percy, mystified, and a little annoyed to find himself the subject of an onslaught directed against the War Minister.

Mr. Frewin jumped to the name.

"It is young Lord Ibbs," he explained.

"Poor boy," said the major heartily. "I should like to shake your hand, sir, if you are his relation or his friend. They tell me he would have made a better lord than his guardian and cousin. Is it indeed true that he flung his life away for a woman's approval?"

"Just about that," said Curragh gruffly.

The whole room crowded about him. He was suddenly filled with the blatant vanity that attacks a bucolic aristocrat, in whose eyes the clubs are the Holy of Holies.

"I say that a woman should have nothing to do with war," he said, feeling himself mightily original. "Either you fight"—he gasped, and looked around him for inspiration—"or you don't. It is the business of nations—of nations, my lord."

He glared at Alvanley, who still fanned himself solemnly with a lace handkerchief.

"I hope that the lady regrets her folly, if it was such that drove the youth to volunteer," said Major Percy.

"Gad! that's just where it is, sir," continued Curragh. "The girl is in such despair that the whole business is a mystery. Now I ask you, sirs, if war should allow these things. Here's a young lord just come into his patrimony—a little idle about his schools and his books, a little bitten with the stage, a little in debt—adores a girl who isn't a beauty, nor even well dowered.

Her father is ruined, and by the grace of a friend she is in the running for a very snug place at Court, and then, instead of knowing when Fate is kind, she quarrels with the lad, puts on my Lady Virtue, sniffs at his harmless intrigues, and rouses him to such a pitch of quixotism that he goes away brandishing his sword, his head turned with love and sacrifice; and now the silly girl cries out for weeds."

"She is his kinswoman, sir?"

"No," interrupted the secretary, delighted to find himself in a position to join in; "but they were brought up as brother and sister, and it is only natural that she should be overwhelmed. He was a fine lad. I knew him well. As for the attachment," he added negligently, "I scarcely think it can have been of long standing. She is—my Lord Curragh will pardon my direct contradiction—a beauty, nevertheless, but of an uncommon type. The Prince pointed her out to me at the Marchioness of Hertford's the other day, and I was as much delighted to see this tribute to the daughter of my late friend and master, poor Squire Cherier, as I was secretly pleased to find my private opinion endorsed by that of so great an expert as his Royal Highness."

"Hang you, sir!" said Curragh, who had added old sherry to good curaçoa. "Is it your business to go blabbing the name of a lady who is my wife's cousin and my guest? And pray do not be so cocksure about her affairs, or you may find yourself behind the moon."

Curragh's friend tried to turn the conversation and failed. The secretary bowed in a way that aggravated his lordship still more.

"I have had the pleasure of knowing Miss Cherier from her childhood, and I watched the whole course of the acquaintance, my lord."

"Then there are some things to which you were not admitted," blurted Curragh. "They must have done it all under your very nose. A poor watch-dog you'd make, sir. The lady whom you call Miss Cherier is June, Lady Ibbs, and my brother brings home her dead husband's last will and testament."

And with that, purple with victory and puffed with vanity at being the mover of so much sensation, his lordship strutted out of White's with his nose in the air.

Pitilessly, indeed, had heaven determined that June should buy her experience at first hand. Up to this moment it

seemed as if she had indeed enough to face for one pair of shoulders, but that which she had borne already was a mere feather to the mountain-load of responsibility in which Curragh's tipsy babble had engulfed her. Alvanley, of course, had the whole story all over the town by sundown. As for the secretary, no one had a nastier shock from the news than he. Full of venom, of baffled passion and fury at the way in which this girl had twice outwitted him, he did not keep his tongue quiet. The malice in the tale as it filtered through from lord to valet, and valet to chambermaid, and chambermaid to countess, and back again was his sweet work. Mayfair suddenly recognised in the girl-widow a creature of infinite cunning, so clever in tactics as to be held in respect by the old hands, but censured roundly before mere misses and persons too young to be openly allowed worldly ambitions. Curragh, scorned by his wife, charged from one to another like a fly-maddened bull, contradicting himself a hundred times, while he laid about him on all sides, whether his object was a man or woman who breathed scandal. This, as is conceivable, only resulted in more waggings of the head and a stronger conviction than ever that June had played her cards to get the young man out of the way and enjoy his estate. June, even had she heard these things, would not have felt them. They were mere straws floating on the ocean of grief and abasement in which she seemed like one drowned.

But publicity made one thing necessary, and this the hardest of all. Gossip had flown so quickly, cackle was so ripe, that the truth could not but reach the Queen by side channels almost immediately. There was this one point in June's favour, perhaps—that her position at Court was so undefined, and so far dependent on the fortunes of the young Princess, that her obligations to her Majesty were scarcely of such a binding nature as they would have been had she been firmly established in the household. Yet one who has been received into the circle about the throne, whether as guest, officer, or dependent, is answerable to headquarters for all private matters that may cast them into any kind of notoriety. It was needful to take action at once, and at the same time June's hands were tied, since she must wait till the Queen should trouble herself with the matter.

The arrival of Geoffrey with the papers in which Conway willed his estate to his wife gave June some mournful distraction. She waited the summons from Windsor daily, and eagerly sought the interview she had at first dreaded. When

at last she travelled down to the Castle, past the dusty posting houses she knew so well, she prayed fervently that the Queen would release her from further duty. Without plans, beset by legal business, she longed for some quiet green place in which to rest forgotten, where, when the horror of death was past, she should wash from her soul at last that stain of a murderess with which she judged herself branded.

She entered the Queen's presence without trepidation. Her Majesty sat in the same chair—the one that was clothed in canvas work—and her fingers seemed more shrivelled, twisted, and blue-veined than ever. Had she not knotted persistently, like a fate, June might have sustained her courage better, and made an impression of greater weight. Though she belaboured herself to an absurd degree, she was, nevertheless, enraged to think that she should have to give account of her actions to any man or woman. She entered the presence, calm, cold, prepared to say but little and resolved in no wise to appeal. But those twisting, impassive fingers unnerved her. They made the ordeal seem unnecessarily cruel.

"What are heart-wounds to us?" they seemed to convey. "One mesh, twenty, a hundred meshes; we make them. Through these meshes Time itself slips and leaves only a fresh mesh for the next hour to slip through. Presently we shall sew on the gold beads. Every bead is of more value to us than your suffering. See, here they lie in the little box—just enough silk, just enough beads."

The Queen made her inquiries at long intervals without looking direct at her visitor. June gleaned that her services were not required. She was sufficiently tactful to disguise a throb of pleasure.

The Queen cleared her throat. At the last moment she seemed wishful to thaw.

"Since Princess Charlotte's future is now established," she said, colouring slightly, "you understand that there is now not any urgent need for a companion. Her thoughts are much engaged. She turns to older persons for help. She has put away girlish things."

June curtseyed. The Queen for the first time looked at her with a gentler expression.

"I do not disguise from you," she said, "that the whole of this sad affair has been in every one's mouth, and that you might possibly find it unpleasant in your present position"—she glanced at the stern black dress—"to come back to those of the Household with whom you have hitherto been on a footing of intimacy."

"Madam, you are kind to think of my feelings. My duty to my Queen places me at her will. You have been very kind to me, madam."

She was grateful for the convention which permits us all to say things that lie on the lips and conceal the heart.

"And you will now, I presume, return to your late husband's estates?"

"Madam, my duty is with my father. After the necessary affairs are settled, I go to Boulogne. He is ill; he is in want. Through too fond a devotion to the Whigs"—she spoke slowly, while she looked the old Queen in the face—"he advanced moneys which will never be repaid. If I can ever bring myself to live among my husband's tenants, it is there I would wish my father to spend his old age."

"You are wise," said the Queen coldly. She knew perfectly well that for "the Whigs" you should read "the Regent," and she stiffened at once. "It is well that your period of mourning—which you will, of course, observe with special formality under these peculiar circumstances—can be solaced by duties of so pressing and suitable a nature."

The fingers took up their knotting and there was silence.

"Madame Beckersdorff will forward to you a packet from me later," said the Queen.

She did not hold out her hand to be kissed and the dismissal was frigid to the last degree.

As she walked slowly past the pages and the guards, who saluted her with unusual deference, down to the gate where her carriage waited, June pictured herself with irony and humour as a little mouse that had played at the feet of Destiny, who had wearied of its toy.

Up in the Castle sat the little sphinx-woman with the bright red cheeks and eyes fixed on her fingers, and through the archways and down the steps stole a shrouded figure of a girl, strangely exultant in her freedom, smouldering with her old defiance of authority, fiercely proud of the long veil which could not only hide the marks of grief on her face, but give no hint of the extent of self-torture which a morbid conscience and a sensitive temperament permitted. The eyes of the onlookers seemed to say, "Ah! see how grievously she mourns him all too late." And none of them knew that to think and look so was but the silly action of an inquisitive child that seeks to stir a whirlpool with a twig.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

A HAVEN OF WRECKS

WHEN the stupendous phenomenon of death, or some extreme disaster, whether earned or undeserved, comes upon the heart, all life is cut in two, and across the chasm so made memory only mirrors in the years that are gone the grotesque idiosyncrasies of the life of a different creature. Yet the old self remains, eternally young, desperately sensible to all things, ineffaceable, ineradicable.

To the eyes of those who saw June in her inornate weeds, gracious only in their simplicity, she seemed like a penitent of penitents. For herself, she looked with loathing on her old unthinking self, yet under the stern serge her pulses beat unguessed, and her hot blood was so young that it made her suffering the keener.

Her romantic love history, her extreme youth, the riches she was reputed to scorn, and her impenetrable silence, isolated her as much at Boulogne as her impulsive marriage had divided her in emotion and aims from those with her at the Court. Upon the company of exhausted fops and broken men and women of fortune about her, she gazed as if at a tragedy of marionettes. There is not only fascination, but sometimes dignity in dolls upon wires. No Stuart ever lost his head with such heartrending pathos as did once a puppet Charles, handled from the depths of a proscenium of pink calico, and voiced by a boy with a cunning quiver in his throat. June remembered such a show as this on the sands at Weymouth, and it seemed to her, while she sat on the *plage* with her father, and answered his now feeble talk as one answers a child, that these other people who basked on the sand were merely dwindled presentments of their once brilliant selves. They still kept up the strange semblance of a social scheme, had their own cliques and sets, as rigorous as any in Mayfair, and their special scandals, all cloaked with a delicious pretence at Mecklenburgh prudishness. They had their notables too, and the more splendid the rascal, the more audacious the spendthrift, the more distinguished was he

among them. The really tremendous wrecks were few, and they held aloof. They were the aristocrats of this niche of debtors, and Lady Mildred, willy-nilly, courted their company, for the bitterness of exile had branded her deeply, and she choked with dulness. Yet even her feline airs could not bring a smile to the face of such an one as Mr. Brummel, who crept into the sun from the gaming-houses and back again to his *mansarde*, or to the smaller of the *cafés*, day by day, with stifled jests upon his lips, and the eyes of a man whom the world has called dead a hundred years since. A ghost was he, but still the ghost of polished and nice extravagance. Lame and unwieldy, he never shuffled in June's presence; stiff and racked, he offered Lady Mildred his arm, and bowed to his friends without a wince; often hungry—as June knew full well he must be—he would rail delicately at the coarse way they have in France of dousing food in oil, and the laughable quantity they give an Englishman for his money. June, while she watched him from behind her widow's gauze as he said these things, saw the lines of bitterness hardening, and the eyes, once full and rich, set in grey pits of shame and rancorous disappointment, and the beau knew that she saw, and returned the look, so that it moved her to speak to him beyond her wont. Thus it was that between the prince of squanderers and herself there was an unseen bond of fellowship. It was not that they touched private concerns. Each knew the history of the other by hearsay. Scandal could now hurt neither, for the one walked wrapped in grief, and the other turned all that was said of him into food for bitter farce. Yet they met often by accident when each was alone, and then they spoke of the things of which both in their several ways had known so much—the ways of a Court and the race for a king's favour—while she would contrast that which Mr. Frewin had called a "snuff-brown Court" with the beau's interjectory reminiscences of the halls of silver and gold and marble, in which he had been wont to buttonhole a prince and call him comrade. And always, ere the talk was halt through, June had deftly turned him to the story of the old quarrel that had exiled the Princess of Wales from England, and torn her daughter from her arms.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, when once he showed her a tattered pamphlet that told of the pitiable strife—"Oh, sir, what mighty weapons you men bring to crush us! How noble indeed are you! What generals! And how magnificent a spectacle is this of the Court which you still serve in spirit."

"That may be, madam," he replied, "but I did not make it, and to judge is but to know little of the whole of this great comedy which will keep the world ringing for many a day. The Princess—poor soul!—has outlived her husband's fancy long ago. Macmahon furnished him with new delights—for Mac always had an eye for a pretty face and ripe lips—and his bastard son, Edward Frewin——"

Her exclamation stopped him.

"Go on!"

She waved her hand imperiously.

"Edward Frewin follows in his father's steps. He'll make a good thing out of it at last."

"And this goes on while the Princess roams Europe?"

"She roams it happily enough. She has her pet courier, and raises his sister to the rank of a countess and a lady-in-waiting. She gathers a learned professor here and there, attracts all the curious and the famous to her. She is vastly amused."

"And since you find her so amusing, why do you not attach yourself to her suite, sir?"

She put the question defiantly, standing still in the sand opposite him, with her back to the little wooden jetty where idlers waited for the incoming packet.

"I am not like the Irish hero who has attached himself, among others, to her service. This is a luxury I cannot afford."

Anger darted through her.

"You dare not," she said at last; but there was pity in it, for the eyes that looked into hers were dull and hopeless.

"I am not afraid to confess it—to you," he said, "for there is in you a sense that knows the meaning of ambition and the dream of life. Though you have told me nothing, and though I hold you free as air from the aims that lead to truckling and jealousy, I know that you cannot bear inaction, that greatness and freedom must be to you synonymous."

She put up her hand.

"Greatness! You talk to *me* of greatness?—I, who have flung my life away in a child's romance, and have been cast headlong—a stone from the very sling of scandal—into a gulf of oblivion."

She laughed bitterly, then drew her veil closely about her, shrank into herself, and walked on resolutely, in bitter regret that she had broken her silence. She turned to him again fiercely:

"Oh! you mistake me. It is not greatness I want; it is

peace and the power to serve, and one thing more precious than all of these which makes all the greatness of a man or a woman——”

Again she stopped. Her companion looked at her steadily.

“You have called yourself a daughter of oblivion, madam; I am its chosen son. I, a hulk, drift close to you day by day, and think myself thereby honoured; and I thank you now for that sweet acknowledgment of your comradeship in this, our evil hour. Who knows how long it may last, how soon it may end? The turn of a wheel, the motion of Fate’s finger, and I may come into the light again.”

He looked with greedy curiosity at the nearing boat. She watched it too, shading her eyes.

“If a letter were to lie on board for you—a letter in the hand you know so well—would you——?”

She paused, for the broken-down man beside her caught his breath, and his eyes grew hollow and eager; his lips moved as he watched the swelling sails glow in the light, and grow larger with each plunge of the vessel’s prow. Then he winced, doffed his hat, and walked away without a word.

She moved on unconsciously to the jetty. Here was at least something living—something that came from England, from . . . Her heart beat with a sudden excitement. Her imagination was busy. If a friend should stand on that prow, and that friend the one whom she most wished to meet, and to whom she most desired to justify her poor self! The whole notion seemed ridiculous, and yet her heart was clamouring for justice, for some one to whom she could show a bill free from the accusations brought against her. And in her heart that judge—he might be never so stern—was Stephen Heseltine. She longed to say:

“Hear me. I have ridiculed you, laughed at you for an ancient, a moralising fool, scoffed at you to the boy to whom I gave my love. Yet I knew you to be true. My sins—they are not indeed the sins of the body, as you told me—but whatsoever they are I do penance for them gladly, so long as you give me just measure. Come and judge me. I defy you to leave me confounded, for I fear you and yet fear you not, knowing your strength.”

She raged inwardly with the old anger of women in such a case, aware that, even were he before her, her new silence and their altered positions, apart from the constraint of manners and her own reserve, would make such a fierce appeal impossible. The packet-boat neared, and the boats put off to it. Idly she

watched them return, half hoping for letters which should take her mind from herself. At sight of a tall figure which sprang lightly up the jetty steps she felt her brain spin. So quickly did this apparition follow her thoughts, that she had trouble not to spring forward with a cry of "No blame from you" on her lips. She clung to the wooden rail, telling herself that Stephen would not see her. Since she stood half across the head of the steps, he could not but pass her, and did it in hesitation, with a gesture of ordinary courtesy, as to a stranger who gives way in the path, for at first he did not recognise the eyes shining under her veil.

CHAPTER II

STEPHEN HESELTINE'S WORK

HESELTINE called her by her old name twice, in his surprise. Then her woman's robes told him of his error, and he flushed. She saw it and translated it, as she translated all such things, as a memento of the lie she had lived. A little lie, after all, to those who knew the inner reasons, but still a lie. The flush was to her nothing but a stab. This man was true, she told herself again and again. He would never fathom the reasons of a girl—her reasons. He would have taken love boldly by the hand, as indeed he took it now, if it were really true that more than pure loyalty tied him hand and foot to the service of the Princess of Wales. And while she could not believe the rumour, she felt that whatever happened, he at least would not soil love, nor treat it as a common thing, fit only for stolen commerce. She argued that he would never credit her with those motives the world had misconstrued in her. And why should he care, after all? Her head swam with the bitterness of the thoughts that raced through her brain as she stood on the jetty. She had said nothing—had not even put out her hand. She bowed, and, stepping back, leant against the wooden rail.

"It is good fortune to meet Lady Ibbs."

The title irritated her in the mouth of this man, who laughed at such honours. Yet her heart thrilled, because there was genuine welcome in his voice.

"I should have hunted, perhaps, till dawn and been none the wiser, for I had not the ghost of an address."

A slight tremor of joy ran through her. Her fingers, icy with the sea wind but a moment before, now glowed. So he was seeking for her!

"I have some papers for Mr. Cherier," he added.

Then her heart slackened, but she answered quietly :

"Will you come to him now? The house is some little way. It is not great or beautiful"—she spoke wistfully—"but where he is content, it is enough for me."

"It is not good news, I fear, that I bring. The small supplies from his farms are failing. I had hoped to pay his debts."

"It is done."

"Then the news will keep. I will go and see him presently. By what miracle is he quit——?"

She turned quickly to him with a gesture of silence. He divined the answer to his question. She turned back her veil slowly, and regarded him keenly. Her voice was almost mocking.

"Conscience-money paid by Lady Ibbs, Mr. Heseltine, in memory of her husband. That is what gossip says; you may join the chorus."

He halted in dismay at her tone.

"I know the howling of that chorus too well already," he said gravely, "to think it sweet, or wish to swell it, since I was its butt these many years."

"But a man achieves only greater fame through it."

"It is notoriety with which I would gladly dispense, madam, for at times it sadly defeats my ends."

"Your ends? Ah! I forgot you, too, were in the living world. Here, in this paradise of derelicts, we forget that schemes exist."

"You—a derelict? It is ridiculous. Why do you not leave this for England?"

"Because my father will not. Some strange sense of shame has crushed him. His health fails; his memory goes. And I? I have no desire to brave the London world or to live on my husband's estate alone."

They walked in silence. He murmured that the streets were strange and curious to a foreign eye. She stopped, confused.

"Ah! I have led you wrong. We are half a mile away from the house."

"Let us go back by the sea. There is no haste."

"We spoke of schemes."

The old girlish ring was in her voice.

"My schemes are foils."

Her eyes asked for explanation.

"The schemes of others furnish me with a vast amount of amusement."

"And are you well satisfied?"

"Very well, I thank you."

He looked at her a sidelong "Can I trust you?"

"Has life been your friend after all?" he said presently.

Her answering gesture was one of indifference; she was not in a mood to be questioned.

"Where does your love of entertainment now lead you?" she asked suddenly and with some irony.

"To the lady whose honour I will protect with my own, whose person I will guard as if it were the Sacred Heart."

He uncovered and stood still for a moment, and the summer wind lifted a lock of his hair.

"Truth keeps men young," she thought, and marvelled that she could ever have thought him old.

"The Princess of Wales is not on her way to England?"

"No; she is in Como—God help her!—for there is less cause than ever for her return."

"The Regent has not secured a sudden divorce from his wife?"

"No, that were the last blow; but there is a double calamity to tell. The news is fresh. I come straight from Claremont House."

"The Princess Charlotte——?"

Apprehension blanched her. She read the answer in his face.

"Why did you not tell me at once?"

"I hoped to spare you. You were once very close to that tortured young life. You know very well the story of her wooing and her marriage, and of her new hopes."

"I know it too well. Here, in this strange exile, I have never forgotten it, and have daily looked for the tidings of her happiness."

"It was quickly over: a few hours. And now the Princess of Wales is childless indeed, and England has doubly lost an heir."

"The child, too?"

"It never breathed."

"Surely, surely the Regent will soften now—that poor, desolate lady——"

Her voice broke. Desolateness had so long been June's comrade, that her heart ached for this sorrow of sorrows.

"The Regent has one more tool to his hand. I mean,"

he continued, seeing her doubt, "that this sets the Royal seal upon the Princess of Wales's voluntary banishment from England."

"But the nation——"

"She has no more hold over it. To appear figuratively on a hustings, with the Heir-Apparent in your arms, before the mob, and cry, 'People of England, behold your future Sovereign in her mother's arms!' is a vastly different affair to knocking at the gate of England with a 'Take me in, take me in and shelter me, for I was the mother of the dead Heir to the Throne.'" His irony was swallowed up in the keenness of emotion. "I would give all my life if it could have prevented that fatal step—the departure of the Princess of Wales from England. It has subjected her to those things which have given her enemies many a handle against her. I said that my schemes were foils, and such they are, for there is not a day or an hour in which danger does not lurk masked at her doors. The friends who would guard her are on the alert, day and night, to destroy the snares that are set for her. She scarcely knows, indeed, who are her friends. Her ladies-in-waiting drop off one by one. She is reproached for taking into her suite the foreigners whom fate throws in her path, while she, the very soul of unrest, wanders over the earth. What else can she do but take foreign servitors? It is natural that, suspicious of all the English, she should put her trust in a stray Italian here and there, who has no interest in the English Court. These people cling to her for the sake of a decent wage; they are persons of no special standing, and inflated at the honour conferred upon them."

"It is inconceivable. Is not Lady Charlotte Lindsay with her?"

"The good creature finds the part of travelling companion too complicated, and the Princess is naturally very angry with her."

She turned to him with kindling eyes.

"You go single-handed, it seems, Mr. Heseltine."

"I do. What does it matter? Gossip is right in saying that I have nothing to lose. If it also calls me a favourite, a sponger, why, that is an insult I can bear lightly for the sake of the Princess."

"You are fortunate. Your name, at least, can bring her no dishonour. If my life had been shaped other than it is, I, too, should be free to offer my service; but to add my name to the roll of her retinue is only to give calumny one more

handle for derision." She laughed shortly. "I have sufficient understanding of her sufferings not to weight her with a clouded reputation."

"You are like that painted fly of which I wrote in an album so many months ago. Why do you flog your wings so uselessly?"

"Because, like every other useless thing, I grudge my bars, am impatient at the lapse of time, and desire action."

She looked entreaty, longing that this man should take her by the hand, and say, "Go forth ; here is your mission."

"This," he said briefly, "is a man's work."

Her hopes died out, for she judged herself of no account in his scheme. She turned her head away, waiting till he should speak again.

"It is not sweet work. There are unclean plots afoot ; Lady Ibbs does well to abstain from them."

The formality stung her. She lowered her veil, and pointed to a turning on the right.

"That is the way to my father's lodging. Wait till the clock on that steeple has told ten minutes. I must give him time to realise your coming. He is slow to grasp things now."

He waited, resting against the carved brown porch of a house. His eyes followed the little black figure that walked so swiftly away with bent head. His face was inscrutable. Presently he walked to and fro, murmuring, "Impossible, impossible!—some one better fitted to touch dirt than this child." Then he took out his pocket-book, and ran his eye down a list of names, and some he struck out and others he marked with a cross. He started to find the clock striking the hour. He wrapped his cloak more closely about him, and resolved to follow the alley to which June had pointed. Scarcely had he turned the corner when she met him, eyes wide, her head bare, and dread in her face.

"He is speechless—knows no one—a seizure. Oh ! come !"

CHAPTER III

THE LADY BY THE RIVER

THE mole-catcher who lived in the cottage by the river at Windsor surely thought the great lady demented who came to him one spring day for leave to buy his house, with the thatch dipping back and front, and the moss clinging to its rat-riddled beams ; but since her folly paid him well, he asked for nothing better than a drier roof and the merry company

of his fellows in the town; and so June had her way, and soon the little cot was made into a not uncomely gabled dwelling, with a new wing thrown out on the landward side.

"'Tis a rural Elysium, my sweet June!" cried her stepship, when she saw it. "How pastoral and idyllic! I feel as if I were a silly girl, and must drag about a lamb tied with blue ribbons. But you will not live here always? Your husband's lands, my dear child, your position and responsibilities——"

June's eyes flashed warning, and the older woman cowered.

"Your father did not believe in the shirking of a trust," she flung at her stepdaughter.

"My father's name need not be brought into this. I enter into no discussion with you or others. I have my own reasons for living here. The estates are well conducted. Oh! do you not know me and my story well enough by this time to understand that a mere worldly glamour of possessions and name means nothing to me? Let this be the last word on this point."

She passed out of the house impetuously, accustomed to lay aside these suggestions with peremptoriness, even as her father had done in all matters with his second wife.

She was heartily sorry for this woman, who depended upon her, clung to her, and lived perpetually in a rosy past and on the little scraps of gossip that she gathered in letters from former acquaintances. Lately Lady Mildred had begun to show more of her old peevish spirit, and June observed that the occasional visits of Mr. Frewin, which she discouraged openly, were the thing upon which her stepmother lived. He would come at long intervals, but unexpectedly, and more than once she had returned from a prolonged visit of charity to a poorer neighbour to find the secretary and Lady Mildred together. An air of patronage on the part of the latter set June wondering what had been the nature of their joint cogitations. Once she walked by the river, thinking herself alone, and heard a rustle of skirts behind a bush, and presently started to see Mr. Frewin advancing towards her a few yards below along the towing-path. Once again she came upon her stepmother and the secretary suddenly as she paced her own garden, and noted how the two moved quickly apart.

To-day she thought on these things as she took the path among the apple-trees that brought her strange love story so keenly to mind. A strange and melancholy notion it was for a lady of quality and riches so to wrap herself in her sorrows and make a monument of the spot on which the

thread of a romance had been cut. Yet it satisfied her, and brought her nearer to comfort; and thus she wove her broken pride in a youth, and her agony in his death, into her daily life, judging truly that, if we would remember the dead, we must live with them and worship them in our houses, and not in stone temples too cold and cruel for human love.

She puzzled much over this question of the secretary. It would be a relief to forbid his comings and goings, though she herself had nothing to fear from his puerile adoration. In her present condition of independence he was not dangerous to her, and she would guard against any foolishness as regarded her stepmother. Moreover, he was a tool in the hands of those at Carlton House. To break with him might be foolish policy if— Once more the old sense of intrigue rushed upon her. Her thoughts ran pell-mell into that deep-worn channel which led her to the cause of Caroline of Brunswick. With eyes on the ground and her breath coming quicker, as it always did when she dwelt on this theme, she walked along the bank. Schemes flashed through her brain. She longed to probe the things that went on behind the great gilded gates of Carlton House. The towers of Windsor were to her towers of silence, for Charlotte the Mecklenburgher was dust. The Princesses, her daughters, pursued the sober paths of domestic nonentity, and one, at least, of them had boldly preferred a shabby Court on the Continent to the withering of her womanhood and youth in cloistered dignity and a colourless spinsterhood. And the King? June could not think of him in that strange loneliness of brain and heart, immured within those walls. And some said that he was at Kew, and some whispered that he was dying or dead, and that the Royal Dukes hid the fact jealously, lest Parliament should stop the salary of the Duke of York as Keeper-in-Chief; but none dared utter these things openly, for none knew the truth.

June's blood, in flood and counter-flood, rushed through her brains as she pondered on the outcome should the Regent come at last to his crown, and when his wife—A shadow fell across her path. In former days she would have been less on her guard, but now she showed the secretary nothing but a mild annoyance.

"I will continue my ramble," she said pointedly, after the exchange of formal greeting. "Pray go to my house and entertain my stepmother."

"With your leave, I will put my business before you at once. Here is a heap of brushwood, and at your feet are

flowers. Shall we sit? My business concerns the Princess of Wales."

The glow in her eyes justified his purpose.

"She is not in England?"

"Heaven forbid! The matter will be easiest settled in her absence."

Instantly she was alert.

"Years ago," he began, "I went to see you at Kew, and knew that your spirit chafed against the deadly dulness of service under the Queen. Great persons do not trust the young, the innocent, and the beautiful with intrigues. You were eating your very heart out in inaction. I asked you if you would not wear the buff and blue in place of the blue and scarlet." She nodded. "The moment has come to you. The Prince Regent once more craves your aid."

She assumed a manner of extreme attention and deference, though her heart leapt with excitement.

"I do not understand how his Royal Highness can require my poor assistance."

She kept her eyelids down, so that he might not see the purpose in them.

"He himself will unfold to you his wishes."

"Then the Prince will come here?"

"No, he asks you to visit him at Kew."

"This is an unexpected enterprise. Some clue——"

"It is a mission—for State purposes."

"You spoke of the Princess of Wales."

"It concerns her. In brief, he wishes you to attach yourself to her suite. You surely cannot have forgotten the valuable service rendered to his wife in the preservation of her honour and that of her husband on a certain evening at Blackheath. The memory of the Prince puts yours to shame, Lady Ibbs."

"To help, in short, to maintain an odour of respectability?"

"To give her that gentle companionship which she lacks in keeping up the dignity of her estate abroad."

She almost laughed aloud at her own successful masking.

"Ah! how vastly sad," she sighed. "It is natural that his Royal Highness should feel a proper pride in the surroundings of one so near to him. Surely it were better to bring the poor lady home and give her a little toy Court in England? Even a *snuff-brown* Court, Mr. Frewin, is better than none, is it not?"

"That is impossible."

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"Oh! now you are peevish. I was only teasing. Tell me what my duties will be,"

"To keep the Prince informed of the disposition of her Royal Highness's concerns—of her—her health, her welfare, her method of recreation, her——"

"Friends?"

"Her friends certainly."

"An easy matter enough, surely."

She rose and began to pace on.

"You are not afraid of the mission."

"Afraid?"

The gorgeous scorn in her voice misled him.

"Then what shall be my answer to the Prince?"

She looked at him keenly.

"That I will keep the appointment at the hour decided."

"To-morrow evening in the gardens of Kew Palace at nine."

"I would rather it were noon, Mr. Frewin. Moonshine and a mission so grave are scarcely in keeping."

"The Regent has ordered it."

"Pray tell him I thank him for this favour."

She gave him her hand in dismissal, and sat in a negligent attitude on the willow bundle till he had disappeared from her sight.

CHAPTER IV

JUNE PLEADS FOR CAROLINE OF BRUNSWICK

It was a woman who once said that white peonies are the ghosts of the garden. The flush at their hearts goes with the sun's decline. Blanched and ethereal they stand in the summer twilight, like witches' globes dipped in phosphorus.

In the Royal pleasance of Kew, these pale bushes abounded, mingling with others that were blood red; but in one of the walks which the dead Princess Amelia had made her own, there were only white blooms, fair, pale handmaids of the gentle lady who had planted them. Amid their grace and spirituality June lingered gladly till Mr. Frewin returned from his search for the Regent, and in this alley of sweet ghosts the fierce anger that had sharpened her resolve melted into the deep sorrow that gives strength. While she followed the secretary, her limbs ceased to shake with dread of the task before her and self-distrust in her ability to storm and carry a seemingly

impossible position. How could she achieve that in which the voice of the nation and the urgent advice of wise men had failed? The prospect was mad. But singleness of heart makes men and women as mad as they are splendid. She felt but one point of irritation—the necessity of watching the opportunity for attack.

Mr. Frewin conducted her to the large summer-house on a slight eminence in the heart of the gardens, by a lake. She knew the windings of the alleys well, for in these mazes she had raced and loitered with the dead young girl who should have been doubly a queen.

In the summer-house shadows lurked. She would fain have seen the Regent's face, to fathom his purpose, but the afterglow of the sunset was behind the little temple, and its shadow enveloped them. She loosened her thin silk cloak, feeling that the sultriness of the night and the tension of the interview would stifle her.

She became aware presently that the Prince spoke earnestly, and that she answered in monosyllables. The details were blurred, but gradually the general sense of his speech throbbed more clearly in her brain. She waited while the certainty gathered strength.

"I need not say more to prove to you that the exuberance of my unfortunate wife exposes her to unnecessary scandals. She must be shielded."

A burst of irony rose to her lips, but she waited.

"Mr. Frewin will explain everything. You will be empowered in every way, you understand, to deal with the information you glean and receive from others, and to employ assistance."

She bowed, still holding back.

"The matter must be sifted. The integrity of the nation and their faith in her demands it."

"Were it not well, sir, to protect her Royal Highness by desiring her return?"

"This departure is impolitic and would greatly incommode my private affairs at this moment. I do not wish to raise the question of residence."

"England is surely large enough, sir, to admit of the Princess having her establishment without distress to others."

"Gad! Lady Ibbs. If you were not so charming a woman, I should be incensed."

"Oh! sir, you misjudge me. I only wish to see this sad quarrel healed. Is it not a sweeter task to assume the innocence

of your wife? To dig for suspicions with the object of their denial is scarcely worth your Royal labour."

His eyes grew lurid and his heavy features sullen, but she gazed boldly, till he turned away in irritation and laughed.

"You are strangely presumptuous in your speech, Lady Ibbs," he said, with the quizzing air that one uses to a defiant child.

"Assuredly not, sir. Those only presume whose cause is a vile one and to their own ends. My cause has the sanction of the people, and I—I have nothing to gain or lose."

"It was for that I counted on your loyal service to the Princess of Wales and myself."

Four years ago she would have been blinded by this suave transparency of motive; now the heaped-up scorn of many months flung itself headlong.

"Oh! sir, you seek strange tools indeed for your purposes. How shall I, a woman, spy upon the comings and goings of her Royal Highness? Am I a chambermaid to be bought by your creatures, or an adventuress seeking worldly eminence? Is this a mission for the hands of one of my father's race?"

He attempted to motion her away, but she stood her ground and spoke again.

"Is this work for the first Prince of this great country? Sir, what is this that you do? Ask your heart. It will tell you that in every spy you send forth against your wife you send a sword against yourself."

He burst into loud laughter.

"Upon my soul, I did not send for you that you might lecture me. You are merely marring your cause, whatever it be. But I cannot but commend your fair eloquence. You should have been in my Cabinet, madam. It is grievous that facts are so against you, for in another moment I should have yielded to your pretty irony."

He took her hand and bowed over it lightly. Inexpressible dislike prompted her to move beyond the reach of his arm, and she answered with brevity.

"I did not come to win your approval of my pleading, sir, but to put before you the sorrows of your Royal Highness's wife."

Still he watched her with an amused air, and still she grew more amazed that he should not let his rage slip its leash.

"Marriage, madam, is a sorry jumble of opposites, as perchance you found it once. God knows that I never loved my wife."

"The people of England know it also, and, for that one

reason at least, the people take her part. One day, sir, you may need the arm of the people. What then?"

He burst into a fresh peal of laughter.

"If my Lord Eldon could hear this catechism! You are as pretty a schoolmaster as you are a perfect woman. I can but wish that your suit were less unlucky." He stooped and scanned her closely. "No, you are too fine and delicate for this work. Frewin is ill-advised. He is perpetually blundering."

"Then, sir, if you have no further need of me, I will ask your leave to go. The hour is late."

"Stay a little. You are bold, you are vastly refreshing. Once—'tis years ago—I met you tripping through Windsor Park. Time has changed you very little, madam."

She chafed at the digression.

"Sir, it is a woman's heart that ages in these times."

"Not yours. The moonlight dances in your eyes—the eyes are the windows of the heart. No, you are young, and gloriously turbulent."

"I beseech you, sir."

"Ah! if I could yield to all the entreaties before me, I should be a happy man, Lady Ibbs."

"Is it so great a thing that I ask, sir?"

The wild impulse to turn him from his purpose at all costs impelled her further. The advantage she had won by sheer audacity was a dangerous glimpse of power. For months she had dreamed of such a battle in the war to which Heseltine gave all his manhood and brains. For weeks she had lived, tense and eager, burning with the unexpressed arguments, the relentless scorn, which she would bring to bear on the Prince, whose power she despised, while yet she sought to turn it from those to whom her heart went out. The bare idea that through her this long strife and sorrow should cease went to her brain.

He turned from her with an air of weariness; then, as if he relented, waved his hand towards the little temple.

"Will Lady Ibbs be seated?"

"Those who plead should stand, sir."

"No, no! You apparently come to teach me my duty, madam. Pray sit."

She yielded, hoping to gain time, but his raillery roused all her despair.

"And so you have constituted yourself an advocate for my wife's honour."

"Think of me only, sir, as one woman whose heart bleeds for another."

He sighed.

"Heavens! what would one not give for a mind so romantic and unsullied as yours?" He looked at her intently; his arm lay on the back of the couch on which they rested. "Tell me, Lady Ibbs, on what do you base your magnificent theory of my wife's innocence?"

She hesitated, fearing to compromise Heseltine, and retreated behind a generality.

"On many things, sir; but chief of those is the love between herself and her dead daughter and yours."

He turned away his face, and tremulously she went on:

"Oh! sir, she lived for her mother's happiness. I, who was so close to her, know how she clung to the hope that the Princess of Wales should one day take her seat by you in the place of honour from which your own hand thrust her. In that hour in which you plan the dishonour of your wife your dead child stands between you."

He laughed.

"The dead cannot stand between the living, madam."

"In injuring the living you injure the dead."

Her voice rang like a prophecy. The laugh died on his lips, he leant back in his corner moodily, with folded arms. She gathered courage from the silence.

Though faltering at first from sheer despair, her words grew stronger, the phrases more impassioned, as she spoke of that wreck of womanhood which the Court had made its butt—spoke of it, indeed, as if it had been a legend of some stranger in a far country—how that the great Prince of a great land sued for the daughter of a petty Court; how she came to give not only her dowry, but herself, to be the mother of the heir to the greatest of thrones; what her homecoming was, and what the greeting of her lord; how the women who were his sycophants stood about the bride like sentinels; how hardly she learnt the customs of her adopted country; how those about her clipped her wings and stifled her youth; how soon, by word and look, she saw that her lord's love was passed, and how he took the jewels he had once hung on her neck to give to the women who poisoned his mind against the mother of his child; how at last the doors of that house were barred in her face, and she was made an outcast in a strange land, knowing no guilt or any fault, except that she had served the King and her lord faithfully.

The richness of June's voice, its delicate inflection, the line of her throat as she leant forward, speaking, as it seemed, half

to herself, half to some wondering child, cast a spell over him. The slight tremor of her limbs, the rustling of her long veil, moved his blood.

And still she spoke—spoke of all that is dearest to womanhood—of sacrifice, and faith, and purity—as one who has passed beyond these things, and handles them as symbols and relics. There was neither pedantry nor scorn in all she said, but only a transfigured strength, of which she herself was unconscious. Nor did she know that in her rapt mood she had slipped to her knees before him. Her speech took her back to the twilight hours at Windsor. She knelt before the Regent as a child might kneel when it asks questions at night about the stars.

At last she paused, and now her nerves ached with the suspense of the final silence. Her heart cried out in an agony lest she had failed. He moved; bent to her. She could feel his breath upon her cheek, and drew back frightened at her own boldness, blaming her stupidity for this personal nearness. She tried to rise, and found that his hand restrained her, while he looked into her face half imperiously, half with admiration, and called her twice by her name. His lips moved again, but she did not hear the words.

She dragged herself to her feet at last, and stood looking upon him. Anger she had expected, failure she had faced for many days; but of such a defeat as this she had never dreamt.

While she stood, he rose too, and then her sense came back, and she walked away beyond the shadow of the temple columns. Every fiend in hell seemed to be grinning at her failure. She turned for the last time, and saw that he stood, self-confident, smiling, a few feet away. She threw back her head, and measured him with deadly coolness.

"My God!" she cried—"My God! what a fool am I to kneel to this man! Oh! sir, you have punished me well, and as befits your kingly splendour. But, alas! your gifts would crush me, who am so poor a thing and so unworthy of your condescension. I pray you excuse me. There are other women still better born, perhaps, and surely a thousand times more beautiful, who will be proud of your honours."

She knelt for a moment, in mock obsequiousness, with drooping head. A moment later, her derision—the laughter of one who fights to the last and dies laughing—pierced the shadows and the light. She turned on her heel and moved slowly away, while the man, knowing his error, ground his teeth under the lash of her ridicule.

CHAPTER V

JUNE IS SET FREE

A DEFEAT truly ; but not without clean battle that swept the way and made future action distinct.

She took the path to the west gate, where her coach waited. It was no longer there, and she walked along the road, angered at the stupidity of her grooms. She reached the main entrance at last, and inquired of the lodge-keeper and sentinel. They had seen no carriage. She waited in the lodge until further search was made. It transpired that a woman from a near cottage had seen the carriage driving rapidly back along the Windsor road fully an hour earlier.

June sought to obtain a chaise, but horses were not procurable. A feeling of strange uneasiness possessed her, and it was with excessive reluctance that she decided to sleep at a small wayside hostel that night, and join the common coach early in the morning. Just as she made up her mind to enter the close bedchamber prepared for her, a waggon rumbled slowly past. She gave one look at the musty low-raftered room, and then ran out to the waggon and flung a coin to the good people of the inn, who laughed at the faddiness of a grand lady in wanting to ride to Windsor in a clover-cart.

The slow pace of the horse, the fragrance of the green load, the coolness of the night, were like a delicious dream. Before June slipped from her seat on a bundle of sainfoin to the ground at her own gate, it was past midnight, and the moon had set. She lifted her face to drink in the pure air as she stole along the pathway and let herself in by a side door.

Everywhere dead, dead silence. Under the thatch her white doves murmured in their lovers' dreams, and outside there was nothing but the rustle of the alders and the song of the water. Softly she turned the handle of her stepmother's room. The curtains were drawn back, but the hangings of the couch in the alcove were closely fastened. There, too, was silence. She turned on tiptoe for fear of disturbing the woman behind the hangings. A sudden tremor seized her, as if something strange were in that room. She crept up to the alcove and listened. Fear grew upon her as she lifted the draperies slowly, and gazed and saw only a blank coverlet and unpressed pillow. She sank down on the chair trying to think. A press stood gaunt and bare, and from the open drawers of

the Japanese boxes on the toilet hung a wisp of faded ribbon. Mechanically she stooped to pick up something that was brushed by the hem of the muslin draperies. It was a man's glove. She cried out in her scorn and distress, and hid her face. Then the long strain overwhelmed her, and she started up and ran from room to room calling her stepmother.

It woke the women upstairs, who came flitting in their bed-gowns, peeping from this corner and that, creatures with shadowy eyes in blue sockets and faces yellow in the glare of a single wick. And soon the sun came and found the lady of the alder cottage seated with pale lips before a cabinet, of which the lock lay broken and the contents rifled and scattered. Little by little she began to pick up the threads of the rumours. A labourer, who pruned in her orchard and knew her carriage, had seen it return and wait beyond the gate, by the order of a gentleman, who dismounted and took his way into the garden. He could describe the gentleman. Her ladyship entered the carriage with him an hour later. They drove to London.

The maids chattered like magpies. June held up her hand and they were dumb, for they knew that her sternness would brook no disobedience. She was astounded, when counting her papers, to find how many notes were gone. Her jewels? She thrust the suspicion behind her, knowing her own carelessness in guarding gew-gaws; but she shivered a little as she put away those which remained in a place of safety, and turned the key finally on the chamber in which the scandal prowled.

The sun hid as the day emerged, the clouds broke in storm and wind. The rain fell in sheets, and the alders wept, the monotonous drops pattering on their sighing leaves like the grief of a woman who has never known happiness. Yet June's heart bounded with a sense of freedom that she had not known since she rambled barefoot in Tyne moss. She had no more desire for pursuit than for recrimination.

She set her house in order, and took a pen and wrote:—

“Five years ago you trusted me, and, but for the grace of heaven and the power of compassion, I had failed your cause. You knew how sorely I was tempted, how grievously I was burdened. I had no courage then. Now I have the courage of all the world. I am free. I have knowledge that will aid you, and I would do loyal service to her whom you serve. If she trusts me, I will go to her.”

"I go a long journey," she told her maids—"a long journey by sea and by land. My return is not yet fixed."

It seemed for many days that she roamed that silent house till the answer was put into her hand. She broke the seal and the first word was sufficient reward—"Come."

* * * * *

By pass and plain, and stretches or brown lands veiled with a shimmering green that grew more intense as the south winds blew more directly into her face, she travelled, scarcely sleeping for the thoughts of long-desired action and the sense of coming contest.

The past was wiped out so utterly that she had neither sting, nor anger, nor sorrow left. She had closed the door of her gabled cottage in silence, as one seals a dear monument to the dead.

Her heart fed, hour by hour, on the certainty of Heseltine's strength and honour. She stilled her eagerness with great draughts of joy at the thought of sharing his work. She cared nothing whither that work led. England, the life behind her, seemed dead and forgotten. The glory of Windsor itself was now a dream. Strange rumours buzzed in the air, and to her the towers of kings had become nothing but a huge *chapelle ardente*.

On—away from the great charnel-house, from the tattle and the jealousies, and the great griefs and the little—to the south, where the sun ripens the heart and colours the eyes.

At Leghorn she halted at last, in obedience to orders, and waited through the long balmy Italian afternoon, in sight of the white highway along which the Princess of Wales and her people should come. When the evening touched the clefts of the mountains and turned their lilac to grey, and when the stems of the aloes glowed golden, there appeared what looked like a chain of black-and-white dust-specks a mile away on the straight road. Quickly the wind carried to her ears a musical jingle as of mule-bells. Peasants left their work and stood in the doorways, their blue linen aprons half caught up into their sashes, their brown hands shading their eyes, and the children who played under the olives cried out that a circus was coming. Nearer came the black-and-white specks, and through the dust flashed the silver bits and the scarlet harness of her Royal Highness's seven piebald ponies, four of which arched their necks proudly in the shafts of her chaise, while the rest drew her household, two baggage waggons, mule-drawn, bringing

up the rear. On the right of the central carriage rode a gentleman on an iron-grey pony, and every now and then he would drop to the rear of the procession to give some order, or restrain the baggage drivers from flogging their mules.

June walked down the irregular street and placed herself on the high steps of a fountain which divided the road. She feared now lest her friend should pass her by inadvertently, and now regretted that she had not waited at the inn till the Princess summoned her.

She said to herself, "They will pass by—they will not remember me," and schooled her face into indifference.

Heseltine saw the black figure leaning like a shadow athwart the white fountain, and urged his horse forward. His face was all the welcome she desired.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCESS OF THE VILLA

"Is the Princess glad that I am here?" she cried.

"Charmed. The weather has been fine, our journey one continuous picnic. You could not have arrived at a better time. There are many things, however, to be artfully contrived, because of her Italian servants. Look, the carriage stops; she sees you."

June hurried into the road.

Caroline of Brunswick leant out of a landau which bore a white linen dust-awning, fringed with tassels. On her knee was a plaintive, olive-complexioned little girl, and by her side a stout Italian woman in lilac. The Princess looked plumper than of old. The lines of sorrow in her face were deeper, it is true, but June noticed that she had accentuated her eyebrows and had covered her own hair, so beautiful of yore, with a dark wig carefully curled. The effect was theatrical. It was as if she defied the fading of nature's pigments openly, for there was no attempt at concealment, and yet the effect was rather *bizarre* than unpleasant.

"You have come to visit me?" she said graciously to June.

June's full heart rejoiced in its freedom and loyalty.

"To serve you as long as I live, madam," she answered steadily.

The Princess gave her a meaning look and then shot a glance at the lady beside her.

"This is another friend who is one of my—what do you say?"

—buttress, Lady Ibbs”—she patted the hand of the Italian—
“the Countess Oldi.”

“Will madam proceed?” asked a gentleman who wore a courier’s dress. He spoke in Italian.

“Yes, yes. Lady Ibbs, there is room for you in the *caratella*. Get in, Bergami. This is my chamberlain—Baron Bergami, of Fracina; he rides in my carriage because the *bastardella* gives him the bile. *En avant*, friends!”

But it was long before the cavalcade found its resting-place that evening at the Villa Vittoria, for in the market-place there stood a detachment of civic personages ready to greet the Princess, each of whom had so much to say, and said it with such infinite grace, that the little olive-skinned niece of Countess Oldi, whom her Royal Highness called Victorine, fell asleep on the knee of her patroness.

All was confusion at the Villa that evening, and June retired early to the inn at which she had first halted. Not till the next day was far advanced did she obtain the opportunity she desired of seeing Heseltine alone with regard to the affairs of the Princess. It was he who summoned her, and they had their talk in the terrace garden while the Princess was resting.

Sheer shame and fear of his ridicule induced June to conceal from him the interview at Kew Palace. The proposals made by Frewin were enough to show him her reason for coming. It was a sweeter task to lay her purse in his hands and ask that it should be used for the Princess’s personal needs.

“I cannot,” he said.

“But it is my wish.”

“Go and tell her so.”

“It is enough for me that you know that this is honest gold,” she answered, smiling, “and I wish her to feel no obligation. There is also the question of rousing the envy of the rest of her people.”

“There is nothing to dread in La Oldi,” he rejoined. “She is vain and she is deceitful, but so stupid, that her lies are those of an ostrich. I forgive her because she is ridiculous—I was always thankful for comedy, you know—and sometimes, when I am full of fears lest any of these hirelings should be traitorous, I am glad to turn and watch the shining face of the Contessa as she flounders in the toils of one of her own lies. Upon second thoughts she becomes pathetic, and so I forgive her.”

“She does not love me.”

“Did you expect it? I warned you. But the fiction that

you are her Royal Highness's guest will stop her from surface rudeness at any rate. Call her 'Countess' and ask her to tell you what they do at the Drawing-rooms at the Quirinal, and she will be for ever happy. She was once there as taper-snuffer-in-chief, or something as lofty."

"How you mock at state! You are the same man that I met at Castle Curragh."

"Yes, but poorer, and perhaps less sanguine."

"That is impossible."

"Unless I am regarded as the guide to a forlorn-hope convoy."

"The Princess does not think it forlorn, at least?"

"How do I know? She is never in the same mood for two hours."

"Does she know about the Regent's plans against her?"

"I have warned her. The truth is that she has so long been accustomed to the idea, that it has no longer any terrors for her. Great heavens! There have been traps enough laid for her these last five years. God only knows where it will end! Sometimes"—he turned to her in frank agitation—"I think that she is so weary of the contest that she would be rid of it at all costs. Do you understand me?"

She did not answer.

"I mean that she is so sick of being dogged by her enemies and cautioned by me that she will distrust me just to spite them."

"Oh no, no!"—it was almost a cry.

"And look at the alternative. My God! Look at that which awaits her after all this while; nothing but another long fight for recognition. When the King dies, no words of mine will keep her out of England."

"And then?"

"Then comes the great duel between man and wife. All that has happened so far is but mere sparring compared with the fight that is coming, and it will be the last."

"Bartholomo! Bartholomo!"

"The Princess's voice. I wish the courier were in the Tiber. He is as soft as butter, and as vain as a doll. Look at him."

Bergami approached them, sauntering under the shade of the ilex which fringed the terrace. There was indolence in his aquiline nose, with its depressed tip, in his full under-lip, and in his long hair, which, like his moustache and whiskers, was prettily curled. He wore the sober dress of a private

gentleman, but even so the absence of cravat and the wide, soft, overlapping collar of his white shirt, that left his throat bare, gave him the air of a mountebank, or an improvisatore, who rhymes for sixpence o' feast days on some popular wheeze. On the lapel of his coat he wore a little row of orders of mysterious institution.

He saluted the two on the terrace and passed on.

Presently a message came to say that the Princess wished to go to a fair at the nearest village.

June dressed and waited. The lady of the Villa was in bad humour when she found that Stephen Heseltine was not to accompany her. She was in low spirits all the afternoon, and very angry with him when she returned because he was still busy with some despatches.

"No business any more," she said, and swept the papers off his table imperiously. "We are going to play a little play to-night. The Marchese Mono is coming in, and his wife and a lot of their friends. I have a brilliant idea. You shall see!"

She ran away and made great preparations, while the courier superintended the setting of a stage with screens and great pots of shrubs and flowers. Shrieks of laughter from the Princess's apartments told of her preparations, and June was summoned to write down quickly the little impromptu pantomime her Royal Highness had devised. The guests arrived early, and were received with infinite ceremony by the Countess Oldi. At the last minute one of the valets came running to tell Heseltine he was needed. He went with a grimace.

Caroline clapped her hands.

"Such a costume for you—a Greek philosopher. *Mein Gott!* You will look so learned, so stiff in it, *und brummend und böse*. Look, Lady Ibbs. He need not act, need he?—for he always frown—like this."

Heseltine submitted with the worst grace in the world. Bergami played the part of a clown with a violin. The Princess, dressed like a statue, was carried in on a white square stool, labelled, "The Priceless Automaton. For Auction." The auctioneer was Vassali, the second courier, and he told of the virtues of the new Paris doll, and how she would work her limbs in any way required to order, and sing any ditty you wished. Upon this each bidder began to sue for her. The sage asked her to recite a stanza of Virgil, but she sang instead a Neapolitan folk-song. Then the clown advanced to woo her with his fiddle, at which she danced

gaily, and at last stooped to hand to him a crown, slipping off her perch to come to the foot of the stage to sing among plaudits as the curtain fell :

“ L’amour demande qu’on l’amuse ;
Il est enfant, toute la ruse
Pour lui plaire est d’être badin,
Et souvent au sage il refuse
Ce qu’obtient un arlequin.”

CHAPTER VII

ONE SUMMER NIGHT

ON the following day the lady of the Villa Vittoria suffered from the reaction of her fatigues.

Heseltine sought her in an arbour to ask for her signature to the documents he had been preparing. June, while she mended one of her mistress’s fans at the window above, could hear their voices rise and fall.

“ You are very stupid, my dear friend.”

“ I only want you to be careful, madam.”

“ Careful ? Why cannot I play ? I am a child here.”

“ You are always the future Queen of England.”

“ I am sick of it. It is a silly game. My make-believe is better. And for heaven’s sake do not call me ‘ madam ’—when we are alone.”

“ As you desire. You must not masquerade—at least, not with your servants.”

“ *Must* not ? ”

“ Must not.”

“ I shall play with whom I choose.”

“ One, at least, of your servants asks your forgiveness for a ‘ No ’ to that, madam.”

She looked at him quizzically.

“ To-night,” she said quietly, smoothing a ribbon, “ you shall play the harlequin instead of Bartholomo, and he shall be Virgil.”

“ To-night, madam, I shall regrettably absent myself from the withdrawing-room.”

“ Oh ! So you say ‘ No ’ ? ”

Anger, and a plucky attempt at amusement, fought in her eyes.

Heseltine merely bowed, and went on rearranging documents and letters. She leant back against the trellis of the arbour,

balancing the pen on her finger, while she watched it intently, lest it should fall.

"You cannot always play Virgil," she said with indifference. "Of course, if you are afraid of looking foolish—— Bartholomo does not mind it, therefore I cannot see——"

She caught her breath at the look on his face. She was ashamed to put him to so much polite torture, but she would not now yield to him. She knew that he was angry, and that he despised anger itself as a destructive and pitiful thing. She knew also that as a gentleman he could not answer, and, above all, that if he were her superior in rank he would not deign to answer a ridiculous suggestion. There lay the sharpest sting. He had never disguised his dislike of her Italian chamberlain. The two treated each other with the utmost punctiliousness. There were times when the Irishman, who, when he chose, could wear Court airs and graces as splendidly as any other, surpassed the Italian in a parade of courtesy.

"Well?" she said quickly, determined to drag a retort or an answer from him.

"Your Royal Highness's other—servants—must arrange their own affairs."

"You are not my servant."

"Only because you will not permit it. I am willing to play the fool—I quote your Royal Highness's own words—at any time, at any cost, except that of your dignity. This is a foreign country; the slightest informality may be misconstrued at the foreign Courts. That in itself is a hindrance to your future position. I have explained myself. I need not trouble you further, madam."

"Stop!" She flung down the pen and rose. "You have said—you have insinuated——"

"I have insinuated nothing."

His voice and face were weary, but her irritability would not let her see it.

"Do you think I do not know what is behind your words?" she panted. "Do you think I do not realise *at what cost* you have played de fool all these *years* for me? Ah! these English. The cost! I gave Mrs. Bury, at Milan, some vases. 'How much it cost?' I heard her ask La Oldi. The cost!"

There was no answer to her attack. Heseltine merely waited with folded arms, gazing past her into the trellis, as if he searched for crevices in the thick leafage outside.

As if she could not bear the silence, she continued:

"Do you think I do not hear what people say? Are there

not plenty always ready to repeat things about my own affairs to me? Do I not know every word flung at you in London for befriending me? It is known that you cast your money down for me to tread upon. What do they say of you for it? And I? What do you think it has been to me to hear these things?" She crimsoned, and her head drooped, but her words pelted like hailstones. "And now you speak of playing the fool—as if I were deaf and dumb, the automaton of last night, all these years. Ah! if you knew what they said!"—her hands went up to her face. "But it is nothing, what they say to me; it is what you have said that cuts. Most true is it that you are not my servant, for you have made me your dependent. I cannot ask you to go away, and I cannot ask you to stay."

He looked at her now, vexed with himself for his late anger, thinking only of the pain she gave herself, and of the uselessness of such words.

"You know, madam, that you misconstrued me just now. These things of which you speak have no being. They are smoke. There is no more war between us than there was fifteen years ago. Do you remember the day I went to Kensington to visit you? I was a mere boy, and my uncle brought me to you. You laughed at my brogue. You asked me what my man's work would be, and I said I should fight."

"I remember," she whispered. "You were such a determined creature."

"And I have kept my word to you; but you will let me fight for you in my own way, whether it is with a pen, or with such money as I have, or by being very rude and gruff when occasion exacts it."

She sank down on the seat again, fiddling with the pen, shamefaced, humble, and petulant, eager to boast composure.

"What do you wish me to do?"

"First to take these matters from England seriously."

"More silly suspicions?"

"Have you not heard how a wet burr that rolls through the dust may grow as big as a pumpkin?"

"Who is the new spy?"

"Here"—he opened a memorandum—"is a list of six fresh names. Sicard stayed behind in Pesaro on purpose to pick up news. He writes that all the servants who applied for employment there are feed by some one at Milan."

"Write to Mr. Sicard and say that I have sufficient for my household, and keep the names."

"And now these papers."

She held the quill towards him.

"Sign for me. Do, please."

"No one can take upon himself the responsibility of another."

He dipped the pen in the ink again and returned it to her.

"If it only could be," she muttered half to herself, her chin on her hand; "if one could say to another 'Direct me, command me, take away my liberty, and let me——'"

She looked up and saw his face patient and troubled. She wrote breathlessly and left the arbour without a word. A little later she went to June and expressed a wish to stroll in the town.

But the road was dusty and hot; they turned back at the gates of the Villa.

Her Royal Highness leant upon June's arm and began to talk of her troubles. Directly the Irishman's name came into the conversation her peevishness returned.

"Is he not ridiculous?" she said lightly. "He is like a regular duenna. He is worse than Lady Anne, and always objecting. I have even put aside my French curls for him. Am I not sentimental? He says the women of his country have hair like mine, only redder, and they wear it in a knot, and I have actually done it so."

"I like it, madam."

"Am I not a foolish creature?" She looked at June out of the corner of her eyes, but did not wait for an answer, and rattled on: "But he is tiresome. He makes me long to spring over the Alps. He has stopped my riding parties, and he will not be gay, like Bergami. I do not want to go back to England. We were so happy at Como, but this warder of mine hurried us all off because of a fancied plot, and sent poor Majocchi away—the best of my stewards."

"If he annoys you, madam, it is only out of zeal!"

"Zeal? *Mais à quoi?* What does any one care what happens? He does not really care." She halted, pouting, angry, and stamped on the ground. "He treats me as if I were a useless thing in a glass case. For whom am I so precious? For no one. Oh, my God! if it only were so—if he——"

At the end of the walk there appeared suddenly the man of whom she spoke, with Bartholomo.

"Look at the two," she murmured. "Did you ever see such a quaint pair?"

"I have come to propose an expedition in the bay," said Heseltine. "There is a little boat in which I can just row you, madam."

"No, you shall take Lady Ibbs."

June, always on the defensive, made a polite excuse.

"*Voilà!* did I not tell you? If people will be so very wise, they must be content to be very solitary," cried Caroline, as she plucked a sprig of oleander and gave it to him, and then took the courier's arm, humming, as she walked, the last bars of the automaton's ditty.

Mr. Heseltine put the oleander carefully in his coat, and wore it there for the rest of the day.

Over the low hills round the sea town there brooded intense damp heat. The night was black. The house seemed to be full of echoes, and yet there was no voice. From the little campanile over the central façade of the Villa the hours tolled on a cracked bell, the strokes hurrying to their close after the first two as if furies had seized the hammer. June rose, half dressed herself, and cooled her feet on the marble of her balcony. The cypresses threw black shadows, but you could not see the shadows for the blackness of the sky. You only knew dimly that each tree ended in a fine soft point, at which the rustling of the feathery, aromatic leaves evaporated—an invisible flame of the spirit—into the night.

As she listened, it seemed to June that a sash of the window beneath was loose. Afraid that it might disturb the Princess, she put on a wrap and went down. The window was at the end of a long passage which turned sharp to the left and led to another wing. In order to reach this window she must pass between the drawing-rooms on the left of the corridor ere it turned, and the Princess's bedchamber on the right. It was the largest of these right-hand rooms, and was intended for a small parlour, but she had preferred it to the state room above because the morning sun shone into it. It had two doors, one which opened into the corridor, the other into a smaller *salle* in which she took her lighter meals, for dinner was served always under an awning on the terrace. Opposite this door, on the other side of the small *salle*, was a small door leading into a dressing closet, which was unused, save as a room of passage, by the "Baron" Bergami, into whose apartment it opened. Usually, however, he entered his own room direct from a door in the corridor. Countess Oldi slept on the other side of the Princess, in a small room that did not communicate with anything but the central passage.

To her surprise, June saw that a light was burning in the small *salle* of communication next the Princess's room, but the ray that came through the crack did not illumine the passage, except for one faint streak on the opposite wall. She went on cautiously towards the end of the corridor, when something or some one brushed past her, and she uttered a cry. At the same moment the door of the *salle* was pushed open, and Bergami appeared on the threshold, a lamp held high over his head, a startled look in his eyes.

The Princess's inner door stood ajar. For a moment only was this much visible, and the next the lamp was blown out by the draught, and the door slammed behind the courier, who groped his way to his room by the wall of the passage. Blindly June went on to the window, her heart beating. She rounded the angle of the passage only to start again, for there, on the balcony, two men struggled.

She could barely see them, but above the whimperings of the one on the ground she could hear the cool monosyllables of Heseltine.

"A nice—piece of rope—my friend—well tied, would—make a fine—cravat for you. How do you like it? Are you tired?"

The creature on the ground prayed for mercy.

"If you wake the Princess I will drop you into the lake, my excellent creature."

"Madame is already awake."

"Very well; it is your doing. The lake is very cool, I assure you."

The Italian howled as the Irishman's fist fell upon him again.

"Pooh! get up. I cannot practise my strength on you. It is like beating a bed of green willows. Stand up! Have you no legs? How did you get here?"

"Through the window, excellency."

"You will go back the same way."

"It is dark, excellency. I shall break my neck."

"A worthy end to such an accomplished climber. Give me those papers that are sticking out of your vest."

By this time June had found a lamp in the drawing-room, had lighted it, and ran back to the window with it.

"This is very kind of the signora," said Heseltine with a courteous bow, as if nothing unusual had occurred; "she has brought a light so that you may not break your neck."

"I heard the window flapping," said June.

"So did our friend here, and he is anxious to climb out again."

The man began to whimper once more.

"Let him go; the Princess is alarmed," said June in an undertone. "She has called up the Countess, and has gone to a room on the upper floor. I do not want the light—I know the way."

She turned and walked away, but waited in the dark at the head of the marble stairs until she heard his footsteps returning. He did not see her till he reached the top stair. His face was white and troubled.

"In which room is she?"

June pointed silently.

"Where is yours?"

"Slantwise, two doors down."

"Good. Please tell her that the Villa is quite quiet, and that it was only a drunken watchman who strayed into the garden."

June took the message and returned.

"She is quite quiet, and lying down."

"Thank you. You are trembling."

"I—yes—I—"

She stopped and turned away, having no words.

"Who was in the corridor when you called out?"

"I do not know. Bergami came out of the little *salle à manger* and went into his room. Only I saw that."

"Thank God! Think of it no more. Go and rest now."

"And you?"

"There is a chair in the corridor for me. I always wake while the Villa sleeps, but to-night I will play sentinel also."

"You will be worn out."

But he only laughed and ordered her back to her room. It was not to sleep. She lay there listening, thinking, wondering what were the thoughts of the startled woman in the room aslant the corridor, and not daring to give thoughts to the suspicions that crowded in upon her. At four she opened her door gently. The grey light fell on Heseltine's face and head. He was leaning back, with closed eyes, half drowsy as it seemed. She saw that the chair was placed across the door of the Princess's room, so that no one could pass in or out without disturbing him. June marvelled no longer at the weariness in his face that had so struck her at first sight of him in Italy. He did not stir. She resisted a strong impulse to touch his hand to see if he were chilled by the coolness that comes at dawn, and slipped back to her own room.

CHAPTER VIII

THE HONOUR OF THE PRINCESS

ALL the morning it rained heavily, and the Princess kept her room. The Villa seemed dead, and the Italian servants, who hated rain as much as any marmoset, huddled together in their kitchens beyond the courtyard.

Only Bergami, while he reposed at full length on a couch in his own parlour, appeared serenely indifferent to weather and all circumstances.

Soon after noon the Princess descended, and asked for Sacchi, the valet.

"Sacchi is seriously indisposed, and has had to leave your service, madam," replied Heseltine.

"Who sent him away?"

"I did."

"Really, if I may not be allowed to dismiss my own servants——"

"He did not wish to disturb you, madam. And his condition was really pitiable—one mass of bruises."

"Bruises?"

"Yes, from a too ambitious climbing about your Royal Highness's balconies last night."

He looked at her intently, and she blushed a deep red. It seemed as if she could not take her eyes from his; and whether hers were full of anger or fear no one could have told.

"It is a great pity he is bruised," she replied, steadying her voice while the colour mounted higher, and her English stumbled as of old. "He was de only one of dem all who is any good as an *avant-poste* in getting rooms and arranging for fresh horses. Now we shall have to fall back on dat tiresome Louis, and it appear to me dat Louis, who has such grand airs, do not know a horse from de wand of a *maréchal*."

She assumed the angry, haughty air with which she always greeted any decisive action of the Irishman, and she swept away, calling for her music-master.

When the rain lifted, June put on a cloak and clogs and went out for air to the terrace. Heseltine was on his way to the house, an axe in his hand.

"More fierce weapons," she said, pointing to it. "O! man of peace."

"Yes, I have been drawing blood again—the blood of a traitor tree."

In the garden beneath, an ilex lay on its side.

"Oh! the most beautiful of all the trees."

"Also the nearest to her Royal Highness's windows."

She lowered her glance. He shouldered the axe and walked by her side. Presently she broke the silence.

"Cannot Sir William Gell, who is in London, request Parliament to provide a guard of honour for the Princess?"

"The offer was made and refused by her at the outset. And a whole army cannot guard her honour when her body-servants are in league against her. But she also is in league against all my attempts."

"You do her gross injustice."

The old quizzical expression came into his face.

"Come," he said, "it is new and delicious to me to be well criticised. But do me the justice at least to say that I have served her truly, and that if I am at my wits' end to understand her, it is her doing and not mine. This morning she is so angry with me that I dare not approach her. Bergami informed me just now, with the most insolent grace imaginable, that she had told him she wished that I would go on to Rome and stay there till she had further use for me. He shrugged his beautiful shoulders and promised to be my friend through it all. He is fit to be kicked."

"Go—and wait the outcome."

"I dare not."

She glanced up and saw that he was gazing down across the white town to the further hills over which the mist of departing rain-clouds rolled heavily. The sound of oxen bells floated up to them. He laid the axe on the parapet, and slowly turned to her while he repeated his words.

It was many minutes before either spoke, and then neither looked at the other.

"Was there a light in the Princess's room?" he asked at last.

"I saw none; only that the door stood open—half a foot, perhaps. The night was very warm, you remember."

"Did you notice the door on the left—the one into the dressing cabinet?"

"No; it must have been closed, but I could see very little. The lamp in the Baron's hand had no shade, and dazzled me."

He took out of his breast pocket an enamelled pouncet-box. There was no snuff in it, only red sealing-wax in fragments. He pieced them together, and she read in Latin the words, "We watch always," and above them, on a shield, an open eye, beside which was a cross.

"That is a strange coincidence," he said, "for this legend and seal is nearly as old as my family, originally a clan of warrior priests.

"It is this which makes me think the game is over," he said, as he shut the fragments out of sight. "The door into the little dressing closet was sealed by me just before midnight, unknown to any one. The Princess had gone to her room half an hour earlier. I heard her turn the key in the lock of that door of her room which leads into the *salle*. I had my own reasons for sealing the dressing-room door, reasons which concern Sacchi and Bergami also."

"You do not think they are in league?"

"No; Sacchi peeps for his own ends, just as Majocchi did. You heard the Princess mention him, did you not? Bergami, on the other hand, is so beside himself with vanity at the way the Princess confides in him, that he is a danger all by himself."

"You do not think——?"

Despair crossed his face. The shadows were under his eyes, the lines of his face were drawn downwards. She longed to combat his fears, even while the chillness of his doubts fell also upon her.

"You doubt Bergami?"

"I do not trust any of these foreign gallants an inch further than I see them, because they have everything to gain by compromising our mistress. If"—his voice failed—"if—and please God it be so!—there is no reason to believe he has used treachery for his own ends, there is still the possibility that his drunken conceit may throw a strange complexion over his intercourse. Sacchi was there to make the most of it. Twice I nearly strangled him; but I had to let him go. To have blood on the Princess's shield is to throw her into the hands of her enemies once for all. So the little hound is gone to Milan, without doubt to report his business to some other spy, and I stay here with hands tied."

Again the despair in his face, and the weary attitude as he leant on the damp parapet.

She looked long at him. The first thought that came to her was a woman's thought—the burning desire to heal and to help. Then a wave of indignation possessed her that a woman's honour should lie between them at stake. She thought of the scene in the garden on the previous day, of the stern, almost rough, way in which Heseltine at times handled his Royal prisoner, of his perfect courtesy at others, of his quiet dignity

towards the household, and the complete *sangfroid* with which he took the Princess's favours. The faded twig of oleander was still in his coat. Absently he pulled it out and let it drop into the bushes many feet below. His action helped her to words at last, and she seemed to have stolen a touch of his own cynicism as she spoke them.

"Truly it seems best that you should go away, for you are putting too great a strain on our Princess."

"How so?"

"How? Are you blind? Are you sure that the love of power does not fill your eyes with motes? Is it only at night that you can see?"

Her sarcasm had leapt almost beyond her control. There is no irony so mordant as that of a woman who is impatient of the obtuseness of the man to whom she has pinned the last of her ideals.

Heseltine answered with a coldness that only strengthened her anger.

"I do not hunt a scandal because I love it. We Celts are men of broad daylight and open country, not bats and skulkers."

"Oh!" she flashed impatiently, "you twist my words into an accusation that is purely selfish and personal. I speak of the Princess, and I tell you you are the blindest person about her—you, who would be her sentinel. In two days I can see what you, after these years, do not see. You are bent on saving her at all costs from slander, from all the horrors of a second course of legal proceedings against her on the part of her husband. It is your daydream. You scheme for it and watch for it. Day and night you work. But you work for *it*. The thing has become an object—nothing more. She knows it, and she is flesh and blood. You treat her as a cause; she regards you as——"

June broke off hurriedly. To say the whole truth seemed treachery to another woman. He took up the broken sentence and finished it lightly.

"As a superannuated suit of armour which she has outgrown—like her ex-lady-in-waiting."

She moved away, speechless and perplexed, with a new anger against him.

"I have told you that your sense of power, and the love of risk blinded you. Have they done more than that? Is it only Bergami who is drunk with conceit?"

Her words seemed wrung from her.

"Yesterday she gave you a flower. You wore it, and her courier scowled. You wore it apparently to make him scowl. She watched you both. At dinner I saw her colour because you still wore it. She had come upon you unawares, before the rest entered. Yesterday she talked to me. She was angry with you. Why? Because you had presumed to advise her to alter the fashion of doing her hair. She said it was impertinent of you, and that only men could despise the fashions. But you knew that she altered it for all that, though she confessed that it was foolish of her. I noticed her face as she said it all. It was the face of a young girl, proud to show herself swayed by every whim of a man, while she rebels against him. I do not know what a man calls it in such a case; but I am a woman—I know what to call it."

He did not answer, but he turned to her, and his eyes were humble.

"I have blundered as a man blunders. I have been very jealous for her in little things, as much as in great. She has beauty and grace, and her youth clings to her in spite of sorrow. I could not bear to see them clouded and hidden by whims in raiment and custom that are foreign to her. And yet I have blundered."

"Blundered? Is it possible that all these years you have not known the truth?"

"I have not wished——" he stammered.

"A woman is not deeply angry except where she—loves."

She felt that she had broken a trust, and gave a little sad laugh.

"It is said now. Let it teach you humility and understanding."

"I ask your forgiveness. I only beg you to believe me when I tell you that a man, if he be a gentleman, does not easily come to full knowledge in such a case. It is ten years since I first learned the Princess's story—since I found that I could serve her. I was full of youth and great dreams then. The groanings of my country incensed me against every crowned head. I flung myself into the contest for freedom of faith and equality of privilege, for self-government. Bands and societies sprang up. I passed from one to the other, thirsting for reform; and I found only bitter disappointment day by day. The goal seemed further than ever. I found only filibuster and self-seeking. I could not face such a one as Castlereagh. My fortune was too small. I could not sit in Parliament because of my faith. I had no mind for very

violent tools. I used my pen ; I exhorted. Canning was my good friend. And then I saw how the Princess stood between the nation and her husband, and I hated him and his kin with a hatred that was real. You know the rest."

"Have you never realised your hold over her?"

"I have seldom been thankful for it. But once, and only once, did I have reason to wonder—Oh, you who have accused me of vanity, how can you ask me to put this into words? It gives me no joy to know that a woman's feelings to me are warmer than mine for her. To a man it seems that, in guessing at such a thing, he does her deep injury. I put the notion away. I embraced her cause. I looked upon her, not as a Royal personage, but as a human being, left destitute of all that women prize."

"And while you ministered to all her needs you starved her."

"Help me. You see how it is ; you have given words to all that I could not say. I have done all that was possible in my man's way."

"Tell me—do you believe or disbelieve?"

He looked at her.

"I refer to this."

She touched the box containing the seal contemptuously.

"You have brought back my faith," he said slowly, like one who rests after a long struggle.

She was not ashamed of the tears in her voice as she answered :

"If she belies herself a hundred times, still you shall not doubt, knowing that which I have told you."

"It has never been said," he answered quickly.

From that day the secret between them lay like a dividing bar, but at rare and unexpected moments of intercourse it changed into a magnet of irresistible power ; yet never once did their lips put it again into words.

Not on that night only, but for many nights, did Stephen Heseltine keep watch at his mistress's door, and behind it tossed nightly a woman who sobbed beneath her breath that love was more cruel than death, and that a hundred acts of friendship were but the mock banquet by which time sought, hour by hour, to cheat the hunger of love. And many a night she knelt, barefoot, with silent lips and hands outstretched, gazing fiercely in her prayers, as if her eyes must stab the man who was parted from her only by the thickness of a panel.

CHAPTER IX

GREAT TIDINGS

ONCE more the old restlessness fell upon the lady of the great villa at Leghorn.

Heseltine was absent for a month, collecting information in Rome with a view to the Princess's projected winter stay there, which would be much influenced by the probabilities of a due recognition of her rank by the authorities, regal and papal. During this time, Mr. Sicard, one of the Princess's chamberlains left behind in Milan to guard her interests, received sudden orders from Leghorn to go to England. He was, doubtless, glad enough to go, for in Milan it was difficult to know who were the Princess's friends. The Baron d'Ompeda, chiefest of those who set traps for her honour, still strutted at large. Here and there an Englishman drifted through the city. It was impossible to tell what was his business, unless, perchance, he was seen slipping in and out of certain houses on the list given by Heseltine to Sicard, and marked with his initials. On the day that Sicard had his passports signed for his journey, he was astonished to be greeted by the Irishman just outside the Consulate. Heseltine put his finger to his lip until the two were safely shut up in Sicard's lodging.

"The Princess does not know I am here," explained Heseltine. "I do not wish my identity disclosed in this city earlier than is necessary. There is no need to trouble her. I wrote from Rome and told her that if she did not hear for a week, she would know that all was well. In any case she refuses to believe in the existence of any organised plot against her."

Sicard shook his head.

"She is the same as ever. Before you joined us, I spent hours trying to prove it to her. I made myself black in the face for nothing. Well, good luck to you, Heseltine. You fight a double enemy, and one of the two is always hidden."

"Has Sacchi presented himself yet?"

"Sacchi, too? Who will be the next?"

Heseltine shrugged his shoulders, and began to pace the room.

"I saw a fellow very like Sacchi last night," said the other. "The coincidence is explained."

"Your papers are ready."

"Everything is ready. I have the result of the last month's inquiry safe in my despatch-box."

"It must not leave your hands till you put the papers into those of Mr. Brougham."

"Certainly not. Once we can point to the existence of authorised spies in the pay of Government——"

"Do you think the Regent knows his business so badly as all that?" scoffed the Irishman. "We can only use our knowledge as a means to prevent any future mistakes in regard to the movements of the Princess, and the character of those about her. You forget what I have told you all along, that our position is that of defence."

Heseltine returned to Leghorn in the first days of the new year, and just before Sicard's dusty carriage brought him across the hills to the Villa. Indeed, the first chaise was still standing at the gate as Sicard flung himself out and hurried into the courtyard. The Princess sent Heseltine to him. June heard the steps ring on the pavement below her window, and her blood ran fast, for there was great news in their faces. She hurried down. At the entrance the Princess smiled her welcome with kerchief waving as the men climbed the steps from the garden. Sicard fell back awkwardly after he had kissed her hand, and looked at the Irishman. Heseltine did not speak for a moment. She noted the excitement in his face, and gave a cry. He uncovered, and presented a letter.

"For your Majesty," he said. "From Mr. Brougham."

Her eyes dilated, and grew blurred.

"Read it," she said; the package dropped from her hands.

"His Majesty died six days ago, in the early morning, at Kew Palace, madam," interposed Sicard pompously. "The Regent is already proclaimed."

Again she put out her hand for the letter, but her steps failed, and her arm fell by her side. They led her out into the sun, where an alcove in the terrace wall beat back the January winds.

When she could speak, she murmured incessantly that she must start before nightfall for England. Within three hours it was manifestly impossible that this scheme could be carried out.

The chill which had made her apprehensive and fretful for many days turned to fever. Little by little the Italian physician who was summoned brought her back to strength, but during her sickness she rested not a moment, and gave none of her people rest, until, in despair, he gave permission for her to move to Rome by easy stages.

Here she could await advices from England with more

comfort, and the fact that she was in a city which so many of her English friends visited enabled Heseltine to travel to London to assure himself of her exact position in regard to the new King and his ministers. His going shifted a heavy weight on to June's shoulders, but every fresh service that was demanded of her she gave gladly, rejoicing that she, at least, could take a share of his burden. It taxed all her resource and courage to distract her mistress. Sometimes while she watched the caprices of the woman over whose passion for the grotesque there triumphed still a strange personal attraction, it seemed that the young Princess Charlotte was here again, grown a little older, a little more imperious, a little less buoyant, but always keen, alert, full of quick wit and satire, and shaken by the old moods.

At the hotel at which they stayed, Caroline held daily a little Court, and would chatter for hours to her friends, whom she invited to visit her in England.

"I will let you know de address," she would say, nodding roguishly, "but if you put 'De Queen, England,' it will be enough. And when my house is ready, we shall all dance fandangoes."

At night this hopefulness would change to abject depression, and she would dine in private with the fatuous Countess. Sometimes she would not even admit June. At others she would take her hand and walk up and down the private enclosure of the hotel garden till the cold Maremma winds set June's teeth chattering. But Caroline noticed nothing—talking, talking—now of all that was gone of her broken life, now of the possibilities of the years before her, now laughing at her semi-royal state, now parading it like a child that wears the garb of the grown-up for the first time. Always before the talk ended she would begin to discuss Heseltine and count the days of his absence, for, fearful of the result of any sudden return, he had gone to England only on her solemn promise that she would do nothing till he returned. The days went on, and still he neither wrote nor came. News dribbled through those on the way to England. Twenty times did the suite receive the order to depart, twenty times were the valises unstrapped and the ponies once more freed from their crimson trappings, and twenty times did Caroline say to her friends, "It does not matter. It is better to wait. The Government must, of course, invite me to return on behalf of the King; the people will insist. I want their welcome; it will come."

She wrote constantly to her legal advisers, urging the expedition of her business. She drafted copy after copy of a letter to the King, and another to the Cabinet. Heseltine's communications were brief, but June read between the lines and her heart beat heavily. She turned away her face when Caroline said, "To-morrow I shall hear from the old Liverpool."

The Princess amused herself by visiting the costliest haberdasher in the city, and ordered a series of dresses and some ermines. The man flung them across a crimson curtain, and the little fat hand of the Countess stroked the fur as she purred in the ear of the Princess.

"No, no, my good Oldi, not here," she answered; and then, loud enough for the rest to hear, "It is the King who shall choose the gown in which his Queen is crowned."

She returned home to find letters from England, and read them with heightening colour.

"Dis Brougham—he dictates indeed," she cried; "but I listen no more. I—de Queen—take my own way now."

June entreated.

"Wait for Mr. Heseltine."

"I have waited long enough. I should have gone at once. The delay will kill me. I will go."

On the morrow the seven piebalds jingled their bits and their bells once more as the procession trotted up the main streets and out through the gates on the north-west of the Holy City. But long before the ponies were harnessed, June had written to warn friends in London.

The *cortège* jolted over bad roads and good, resting some few days at Milan, in spite of Sicard's entreaties. Once more June drank in the air of the mountain passes as they left Mont Cenis behind and came into the neighbourhood of Chambéry and Aix. At Geneva the colour and stillness of its waters had acted like a temporary soporific upon the restless Queen.

"I should like to dip my hands in it," she cried as they drove into the town, nor was she happy till Sicard stopped her carriage and gave her his arm to the shore. She fell in love with a boat that bore an English name, and hired it for several days, and with it a young zither-player.

"He has the blue Irish eyes," she said to June, and then coloured and was very silent for the rest of the day.

Her people fed her whims, and ensured as long a delay as possible. In this the indolent Bergami was at one with Sicard, while Countess Oldi was also a great assistance, for she groaned whenever the idea of a fresh start was mentioned

and loved slumber and regular meals under some more spacious roof than the hood of the Queen's landaulet. But the weather broke, the lake grew angry, and her Majesty took fright. They took to the road again, travelling by night to avoid the choking dust and to spare the horses in the burning plains through which they passed, till they came to Dijon. There, as the carriages drew up in the courtyard of a house in which lodgings had been ordered, Caroline gave a little scream of surprise, for Heseltine stood at the door to hand her in.

She hung her head like the scolded child of other days.

"Well!" she said defiantly, "well! I am here. I have broken my promise to you, but you need not think I am sorry."

She leant back against a cabinet, her eyes proud and yet full of a softness that seemed like tears.

"It is I who must be sorry," he answered gently, "for I have tried to save you from that which is coming, and you have shown me for the last time how little I can really do for your happiness."

She caught the word and flung it angrily back.

"Happiness? *Mein Gott!* Happiness for me? I do not expect it. I am not so foolish. I do not cry for de moon, dear friend. I want justice. I will have it."

"There is still time for you to turn your horses' heads."

"Where?"

"Anywhere but towards England."

"I am not a child to be frightened by that cry any more. England took me to pay the debts of its Hereditary Prince; England shall guard me now."

Heseltine went down on his knee.

"You spoke of justice, madam. Justice has strange, dusty corners, in which many a foul deed is done. Your enemies are very strong. They sway the Cabinet, they must truckle to the new King; it is their business. If I could wrest justice for you, do you not think that my life would be lightly given?"

"No, no; your life is valuable for others."

"It is given in your service."

"I have doubted you," she said, stooping to him and holding out her hand.

"I know it."

"And you have doubted me?" she asked fiercely.

"When my arm fails you," he said quietly, "it will be time enough to speak of such things."

"Stiff, stiff Englishman."

She gave a little sigh as she drew herself up again.

"There is very grave news. I beg you will hear it before you choose——"

"I have chosen."

He rose, bowed, and once more put on the abstract air of her man of affairs.

"When you are ready to see the letters I have brought, I shall await your message and bring them."

She put up her hand and went impetuously to him.

"Not now," she pleaded—"not to-day, nor to-morrow. I want to rest, to prepare myself. I want my journey to end in peace. I want to feel like a child on the last days of my holiday. I want——" She faltered, and smiled through her tears: "You will humour me, you will keep the truth away, dear friend?"

She passed swiftly out, and June, who waited, led her away

CHAPTER X

MR. CANNING'S ARCH TEMPTATION

So did Caroline of Brunswick hurry on to her fate with bandaged eyes, knowing not that while she hid from them all that was ugly, she refused also to see the pitfalls which her action dug for her friends.

Her favours were, perhaps, small. Her gifts, as shown by her bitter remark in the arbour to Stephen Heseltine, surely often fell short of our British estimate of value. But no woman ever had truer friends, and none ever tested them more cruelly, and it is certain that, of these, the generous and the great-hearted dwelt no more on their sacrifice than upon the littleness of their privileges. Such a sacrifice is its own reward in an ironic as well as a conventional sense, for the applause of a sacrifice is usually tempered by honest pity on the part of the onlookers.

Those of Ministerial circles had long wondered how the fealty of such a man as George Canning would bear the strain that a Percival could not face. Canning's self-exile, so his friends called it, was over, his star slowly in the ascendant, and none who knew him in the Cabinet, or in his literary retreat at Fulham, could tell what his decision would be should the new Queen challenge her friends to rally.

To come upon him on a summer evening in his avenues,

snipping a bud here and a leaf there with tender scrupulousness, was no index to the man as his colleagues knew him—if, indeed, a man so resolutely single in action can be said to own colleagues.

The picture brought a puzzled smile to the face of a visitor who walked through the gardens of Gloucester Lodge. Mr. Canning saw him at some distance, and the two approached with formality.

"Lord Hutchinson!"

The other apologised for disturbing a holiday; his hesitation was visible.

The ministers walked up and down under the limes, but the dreamy quiet of the evening was gone; for in a spirit so finely tuned as that of the host, the nervousness of his guest found instant response.

The latter floundered repeatedly, and Mr. Canning at last asked him in gentle irony whether he was not ashamed to spoil such a night by talk of Committees—a night for elves and sprites and fairy queens.

"I will talk of queens if you choose, Mr. Canning," said the lord, "and of one in especial, whose spritishness is likely to prove more teasing than any of us have dreamt."

Mr. Canning's manner changed to one of military attention.

"Brougham has not yet communicated with me," he said shortly.

Lord Hutchinson broke out with the irritation of a man in fear.

"Canning—in one word, it is the devil—she is coming."

Canning did not speak.

"Coming in the flesh. Poor Brougham! As if there were not enough to do in the middle of the session, without having such a piece of work as this, and all for lack of an ounce of courage."

"Courage, my dear sir, is scarcely the deficiency. It were easier for her to run away, for if the Princess of Wales, Queen as she is, comes back to England now, she might as well fling herself upon a hedge of lances."

"She makes it hard for her friends to assist her," said the lord drily, with a quick side-look at his host.

"And in exact proportion does it become easy for the King and his friends to bully her into the wrong," answered Mr. Canning smartly. "You have a letter? What is the date?"

"June 1st. She left Geneva a week ago. She will be at St. Omer in a couple of days."

"The King?"

"Alternately savage and triumphant, and again he affects to treat the whole thing lightly."

"You know that this is merely to gain time. What is it that he really contemplates?"

The lord shook his head.

"I have as much a right to know as Brougham himself."

"The less you know, Mr. Canning, the better."

Canning stepped back in indignation.

"My lord, this is no private matter. The case is not one of the bickerings of a husband and wife in a divorce court. It is a question of nothing less than bringing a suit for *lèse majesté* against the King's consort on the assumption of her infidelity. In 1806 it failed. It is incredible that the King and the House you represent will brave the attempt again."

"I warn you, keep out of it. Let others, like a certain Irishman who has nothing to risk, burn their fingers and rend their garments over her affairs."

"If only she would not act in such haste!"

"The poor lady is anxious about the fit of her State garments: a woman's privilege, after all, Mr. Canning."

"My lord, I think we may dispense with these trivialities in view of the main issue."

"In brief, she comes to assert herself."

"Pardon me, to be crowned for her long-suffering, and acknowledged in the only way that can give her peace."

Lord Hutchinson settled his stock uneasily and cleared his throat.

"No man," he blurted, "even the most dogged, can rise in office and also remain the friend of this Princess—for Queen I may not call her."

The fold between Canning's brows deepened with some excitement, of which he gave no other sign. He met the gaze of his visitor quietly.

"There are not too many roads to success, in the vulgar interpretation," resumed the other, as if calculating his words, "and it is only straining at a gnat to refuse an office in which no individual responsibility is incurred."

"It takes some men a monstrous time to learn to be tools, does it not, my lord?" asked the other. "Is it perhaps a happy knack requiring only practice, or——? Pardon me; you have passed my newest standard rose without any comment. It is a gift of the Duchess of York. Quite a suitable flower for your lordship, and on the right side of the Royal barrier. Forgive me. I ran away from the subject, but it puzzled me that you,

knowing my present position as President of the Board of Control, could speak to me of 'no individual responsibility.'"

"Your disdain of 'proud combinations' is fully acknowledged on all sides, Mr. Canning," said the other, with a half inclination; the tartness in his tone he made no attempt to disguise. Once more he knew that he had floundered, and that he had been tossed on the point of his colleague's irony.

"Since your lordship is of that group, let the adjective—not mine, remember—stand."

There was a moment's pause, after which Canning became grave again, and in his voice pride and deference mingled.

"My lord, the man who cannot co-operate is as much a man of straw as he who cannot act on his own responsibility whenever his God and his fortune demand it. Every helmsman is proud of his post. He has a force under his hand to swing this way or that with his finger; but he must foresee its trend. That should make a man humble. My seat on the Board was built for a man. As a man I seek to fill it, not as a figure-head. How, then, can I in such an affair as this act like a figurehead, or voice inclinations that revolt me?"

"It is only fair to tell you that the King has touched on this matter. Mr. Canning, he is still well disposed——"

"He has sent you here with a plummet, my lord?"

"No; I anticipated this, Lord Erskine suggested, Whitbread insisted. The whole of the administration is in a half-crystallised state."

"Will the King open fire?"

"There is not the least doubt."

"If it were only a case of the King's refusal to acknowledge his wife as Queen Consort——"

"Quite so; no one in either party can make this a personal matter. The decision abides with the law officers, pure and simple."

"But what of distinct aggression? Once more, will the King move first?"

"His seal is put to nothing, and I am not at liberty to give any details, Mr. Canning; I can only repeat the words of those who sent me. A certain promotion lies close to your hand. Changes in the Ministry are imminent. Grasp it. Wavering spoils your case."

The two men faced each other. Canning seemed to tower. The realisation of the moment lit up his face, blanched with a great strain. A thousand feelings stormed it. But that which remained in his face was neither sunshine nor shadow,

triumph nor shame, but a white light of intense vitality, as if his purpose devoured him. Vigour lay in every line, in every plane. His closest friend could not have said of him, "This is a man grievously tempted." His voice shook slightly—it may have been with contempt—as he echoed his visitor.

"My case, my lord?"

The other grew impatient.

"Why mistake my meaning? For nearly two years you buried yourself in Lisbon. Now the road is clear; you have a sphere of broad activity. You can help the Catholics as you never helped them before. Even Castlereagh is more or less out of your way. I cannot see that you need do more than obey the King's bare orders in the event of his indictment of his wife. Above all, you may satisfy your conscience and assist the King in the same breath. *Use your influence to keep her away.*"

"And so the King has sent you for this."

"Frankly, no. I ask it of you for the sake of both Houses."

"At last, my lord, we have the object of your visit; but remember, I cannot interfere with Brougham. She blames me for my old advice to her. I am absolutely powerless at this juncture. As for the other matter"—his resolution blazed once more in his face—"if the lady I hope to greet as Queen is once more compelled to stand before you, my lord, and your comrades at the bar of Westminster Hall, I must decline the post of head policeman, be its emoluments never so fat."

"You remain neutral?"

"No! I resign my present prospects and my seat. My honour is my own; my staff of office is more easily spared."

"Well, Heaven help all of us! The Regent's advisers will surely stay the deluge as long as they can."

The two politicians clasped hands with some warmth.

"Overtures give time, my lord."

"Would to God the coronation could be rushed at full gallop, like a Gretna marriage."

So piteous was the lord's groan that Canning laughed, the boyish laugh of a man who has leaped a chasm of dishonour.

"A Gretna without a bride, my lord? You paint a one-legged romance indeed."

CHAPTER XI

BEFORE THE STORM

THE Queen's *cortège* set out from Dijon the morning after its arrival, before the shutters were down in the narrow streets and while the roses and pinks still slept in their paper caps under the striped awnings of the market. Mr. Heseltine, as usual, rode, and with him Vassali, William Austin, and Sicard. It was the Irishman's arrangement that the caratella should be exchanged for a light chaise in which June could travel alone, while Bergami, who was too limp a creature for the saddle, rode on the box of the Princess's landaulet, and the maids chattered like starlings in the bastardella behind, with Hieronymous to order them about like a bashi-bazouk. June rested, despite the weariness of the continual rumble of wheels. She had books to distract her, and her eyes, giddy with gazing upon field and thatch and poplar through swirls of dust, dwelt often upon the story of that sad queen of "The Winter's Tale," who bore her cruel repudiation so nobly. As she turned its leaves, Perdita's sweet song of the flowers that she would give to all her pastoral comrades came upon the reader like a waft of the English spring, bringing the very scent of those

Pale primroses
That die unmarried ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength.

And, blushing, she would close the book a little sharply because of its weakness for opening at that particular spot, and would plunge into the ancient Celtic songs in a little crimson and gold book which she carried in her handkerchief satchel. They were like the voices of rills and bird-calls. The book Heseltine had given her, for he himself had translated them into lyric English from the wild, free stanzas of bards that trafficked with the dear saints. She could not read very far in them, for then the bird songs grew so gay that they pierced her heart, and once more the remembered things of simple days looked at her from across a barrier. It is such a barrier as this which stands between the man whom fortune has made a drudge in cities and the green expanses in which he once walked and rode, acknowledged and befriended by his fellows. The odour of the street is not the choice fragrance he would choose did fate permit him to be a dandy, but

he would a thousand times prefer it to the pain of smelling eglantine with memories in its chalice.

Thus the widowed girl in the chaise closed her book often. It was better to wrap herself in thoughts of the present, and the more she looked onward the more did her heart and mind quicken and expand.

At every halt—and these were not long—Mr. Heseltine would himself serve the Princess with wine at the door of her carriage, and he never remounted without dropping back to flash a greeting upon June. Half-way to Monthard she went to offer her services in case the Princess should wish a change of companionship. But Caroline was irritable and refused the offer abruptly; moreover, a gleam in the little pig's-eyes of the Oldi was not reassuring. June went away almost with tears in her eyes. She looked wistfully at Mr. Heseltine; but he turned defiantly on his heel and walked to his horse, and it was the kindly boy Austin, her Majesty's adopted son and much discussed *protégé*, who held the chaise door open. June signalled to him to ride by her, which he did, and cheered her by his British wonder at the things they saw—the string harnesses and the poor trucks and cots of the peasant farmers.

At Villeneuve they had not meant to stop, and, according to the route planned by Heseltine, should have avoided driving directly through by taking a road that passed a mile beyond the town. But whether Vassali's vanity—for the grandiloquent second courier felt that his *rôle* of herald-in-chief of the Queen of England could only be played for a few days longer—or the finger-posts (great wooden pillars, with the First Consul's initials still cut into them at the base) were at fault, is not clear. They struck the *paré* when it was too late to turn the cavalcade round without exciting a crowd which already began to swell their procession. A troop of horse, billeted in the outskirts on the eve of manœuvres, came out to see the fun. The colonel, full of gallantry, gathered a handful of his privates into a square in the road in front of the inn in which he and his majors and ensigns were dining. With his hand upon his digestion he made a rapid speech, in which he likened her Majesty to the Queen of Sheba on her way to Solomon, and descanted on the superiority of the Countess of Wolfenbüttel (for such was the title under which the Queen travelled) to that august lady, in that she was Solomon's own spouse, and came but to receive the crown which calumny had so long

withheld from her. Upon this, Bergami (without prompting) climbed upon the driving seat of the landaulet and thanked the colonel in the name of the Queen. His fervour, mounting like the *bise*, led him into higher flights even than the first speaker, and as he proudly entered upon his peroration he smote his breast and plunged into the plural.

"To what are we going, friends? It may be to support her steps as she mounts the throne of England; it may be to fight a passage for her on that same stair, and that the carmine blood of our faithful hearts will stain the marble. Rose leaves or blood, it will be of our strewing—ours, her faithful friends."

And again he smote his breast.

Whether his enthusiasm had communicated itself to the team of piebalds, or whether Mr. Heseltine's grey, for nothing but sheer spirits, curvetted a shade too near the leader on the off side, cannot now be estimated; but this one began to kick, and the two behind it to rear, and Bergami, Count in his own right, courier by profession, and Baron of the very important Order of Caroline Amelia Elizabeth, Countess of Wolfenbüttel and Queen of England, was pitched forward on to his nose almost into the traces. The driver helped him quickly back to his place, and while the cavalcade was once more set in motion, Heseltine dropped behind. For a moment or two he was close to June's chaise window. There was thunder in his face, and to her inquiry he muttered, "There has been enough of this. At St. Omer I will send this morris troupe trundling back to its own country."

More poplars, more dust, more sunlight on the white farms of Champagne and Picardy, more heat eddying over the fields, more wondering peasants, and at last the rumble of the *pavé* once more between narrow houses, of which the gables were scrawled in zig-zags of purple shadow on the streetway of St. Omer.

"Are you not weary?" said June compassionately to the Irishman.

"Not half so weary as my horse, Lady Ibbs. For at this point I welcome a guardian angel, and I shall get rid of all this riff-raff"—he pointed to the couriers—"within twenty-four hours. At the hostel at which we sleep, sits Lady Anne Hamilton. I have never loved her croaking and her bristling prudery, but in this hour I could kiss the hem of her garments, and write her a letter of adoration in my life-blood, for she is more to me than the countenance of all the Parliament and all the bulwarks

of England as a defence against the dangers that surround our mistress."

The *cortège* moved forward in jerks, owing to a block in the street caused by the overturning of a truck of vegetables. Suddenly June saw Mr. Heseltine salute a gentleman on foot and spring off his horse. They dropped back in conversation. Then Mr. Heseltine signalled to the chaise, which stopped, and came up and opened the door.

"If you will accept my arm as far as the inn, it will be best," he said; "the streets are full of people, and you will only be delayed. I am most anxious that you should be near at hand to prevent a squabble between the Oldi and Lady Anne."

"Nay, rather let me escort this charming young lady," said the gentleman behind him; and June recognised Mr. Brougham. "If anything could strengthen the counsel I am compelled to offer the Queen, surely the mediation of this lady would be the necessary element."

He bowed her out of the chaise, and she could not well refuse the courtesy.

"You appear to be as surprised as I expect her Majesty will be, madam," said her escort, with a sly smile; "but there was no time to warn any one of my coming. I am here to help you and the rest to make a last stand. Lord Hutchinson and I have travelled without resting from St. James's."

"I fear it is useless," she sighed, "and if you could keep her here a month, or even three, she will have her way in the end. Where is Lord Hutchinson?"

"In discreet hiding at our lodgings. I do not wish to frighten her at the outset."

They reached the inn after a few moments, and June went to the Queen. Mr. Heseltine was already there, and Lady Anne, punctilious as a chamberlain, impenetrable as a fate, was in the window niche. To June it always seemed that Providence had ordered that this lady should pass through the world as a silent critic, with stiffly folded arms, dwelling for ever in an alcove with her back to the light. Mr. Heseltine was speaking as the door opened, and the Queen flashed out her answer:

"Well, I have no objection to see him. Tell Hieronymous to lay another *couvert*. I only regret that Mr. Brougham should have troubled himself to come all this way to welcome me after refusing my repeated requests to meet me earlier. Of course you have made it clear to him that this is not the place for discussing my affairs. What does he say of the Royal frigate? When will it be at Calais?"

"There is no communication from the Government, madam, on this point."

"The Government? Does Mr. Brougham represent the Government? Tell me everything."

"Mr. Brougham is the one to speak, madam."

"Who else is here?" she gasped.

He did not answer.

"I wish to know," she said with petulance.

"Mr. Brougham and Lord Hutchinson. I have a letter for your Majesty."

He presented it.

"I cannot open it," she said, her voice quivering. "I begged you to keep all this away from me," she added in reproach, "till—till the other side was reached."

Again it seemed to June that the Princess Charlotte was before her. With startling distinctness there passed before her eyes that figure of the young Princess who crouched in the hollow of a yew-hedge in the Queen's garden at Windsor.

"If you are afraid to face these matters now, madam, you will be equally afraid to face them in England."

There was a touch of something that was not defiance, and did not quite touch irony, in Heseltine's voice, a something which brought his mistress to herself again.

"Afraid?" she cried, and gazed at him in deep anger for almost a full minute. "A chair," she commanded.

He brought it, and as she took the letters from his hand he bent and kissed hers, and her eyelids quivered. But no one saw this, for she had her back to her ladies. She read slowly and then gave him the letter, which, after scanning, he handed back to her.

"The Government offers me an annual fee of so many thousands for staying out of England, and for abjuring my Royal titles," she said, while her eyes blazed with sarcasm. "The Government wishes to be comfortable. It is like an old man, respected of all and lauded for official prominence, who is too lofty and complacent to trouble himself about the evil wrought by his neglect of private obligations. I, too, wish to be peaceful and contented, free to come and go. And if it means a little fight for that peace and contentment, I do not mind. I am sorry if it gives the old papas of the Government twinges to fight. They can, however, sit in their armchairs in the House of Lords, while I, the Queen, must perhaps stand. They may soothe themselves with this thought. I stood in 1806; I am not afraid to stand in 1820."

She began to laugh at her own bitterness, and flung her head back with shaking shoulders. The laugh died away into dead silence. She folded the note into the smallest possible square and cut it into pieces with her embroidery scissors. The fragments fell about her. Mechanically June stooped and gathered them up.

"Mr. Brougham can dine with the *papachen* of the Government," said the Queen briefly.

"Will you send him back without seeing him at all, madam?"

"Bah, bah! let him wait on me after dinner. Lady Ibbs will write to him for me, will you not? Or there is the Contessa. Yes, I will tell the Contessa——"

"Does your Majesty intend that this lady shall accompany you to England?"

She fidgeted. Lady Anne coughed, and passed into an inner room, signing to June to remain.

"As your Majesty's purse-bearer, I should like to know the full list of your suite at this juncture."

"What do you wish me to do?" was the weary reply. "I will not dismiss Bergami or the Contessa—certainly, not to please another person's whim," she added with fierceness.

"Then I will give my duties into the hands of M. the Baron Bergami, of Fracina," he said gravely.

CHAPTER XII

THE HOME-COMING

JUNE watched the expression in the Queen's ace. Here was anger, pride, quick-sore and quivering, granite resistance, and at last a desperate humility that yet surrendered only inch by inch. But the surrender was not yet.

"Bartholomo cannot do figures," she said curtly; "he is not nimble so."

A stir in the passage left the matter undecided. The door opened. There appeared, above the head of the inn servant, a tall, red-faced gentleman in a much-flowered waistcoat hung with many seals.

"Why, 'tis Alderman Wood," cried the Queen.

"The same, madam, and your servant," said the grand crimson gentleman, and fell on both his knees.

The look of comical disgust on the Irishman's face made the whole scene, June thought, like one in a melodrama, as indeed

it was, with the sudden appearances and exits of important persons in this strange foreign spot, at such a crisis of the journey.

"But how did you come?" asked the Queen, turning about her as if in a dream.

"By the *Don de Dieu*, of Cherbourg, madam, from Dover Harbour."

"Heaven has certainly sent your Majesty a token direct," hummed the Irishman, inclining his head towards the alderman, who still knelt on both his knees, for the very good reason that he could not rise without first supporting himself on his hands, all fours; and this (though beyond the City Griffin they do not have much to do with the dancing-master) he knew to be not the very best way of reassuming uprightness.

"The vessel awaits your Majesty at Calais," he responded with renewed fervour, casting a side glance to the right, so that perchance a slight imperceptible wriggle along the boards might land him within reach of the support of a stool. "It is indeed well entitled, for it shall bear to England her Queen, the gift of heaven to the nation."

"Aha! *mein* dear alderman, how long have you been studying fine language? Fie! I believe you christened de boat anew *en route*. Assuredly she is *le don de Dieu*, gentlemen, for that which Parliament refuses to provide drops down all ready from the clouds."

She laughed again satirically, and turned for a moment to the ladies. Meanwhile the alderman risked the pose on all fours, and his seals and chains jingled as he straightened himself out.

"You see," said the Queen to Heseltine, "heaven itself interposes. My St. Michael here is come direct. That is answer enough to Mr. Brougham and the lord with him. My dear alderman, your face is as cheery as an English fireside. Tell me all the London news, for I have been an exile ever since you and your family visited me last at Blackheath."

She took his arm and led the way to the room where dinner waited. The meal was long, and served with as much pomp as the inn could assume. The Queen made it even longer by her chatter. She included in it every one at the table. Her astounding vivacity was that of the man of impulse, who, swayed apparently by the last advisers, contemplates, nevertheless, a desperate action without reference to any one. So her Majesty, with her friends and counsellors about her, played with them as a generous warder with his prisoners on parole. To be honest, she meant no malice by it, yet, while she knew that

none of her followers would easily desert her, she perhaps forgot that there was among them a little handful with whom service was a case of *noblesse oblige*, and that upon these her gaiety fell like a lash. William Austin, poor lad, grew so weary of standing by her chair that he almost nodded on one leg. When the Queen at last rose from table and entered the saloon where coffee was served, June noticed that she wore her black travelling petticoat still, and had merely discarded her cloak of puce sarcenet, and exchanged her bodice for one of cooler build.

When the other gentlemen followed into the saloon, Mr. Heseltine was not among them. The alderman contrived to isolate the Queen, and by her gestures and tone, low though it was, the rest knew of what they spoke. The company looked at one another, and none dared touch on the subject. Those of the suite whose love of adventure and desire for gain had brought them so far, glanced sidelong at those who waited the issue of that day in a species of weary indifference. Presently Bergami, by a ruse, succeeded in detaching the alderman, and took his place.

"Do nothing rashly, beloved lady," June heard him say in French. "This Englishman means well, but it is the glory of restoring your Majesty to England, it is the self-glorification of assisting, himself, in his rotund person, at the entry of your Majesty into London that renders him blind to your true interests. I do not say to you 'Do not return,' but I say this contemplated return under such an escort savours of *bourgeoisie*. Appeal to the nation. Mr. Brougham is here to your command. Your manifesto shall vibrate to the ends of Great Britain."

"The Queen of England, my dear Bergami, can afford to ride with a dustman as well as a baron," she replied, laughing maliciously, "and all delays are dangerous. Where is Mr. Erin?"

There was no need to answer, for the door was already opened by Heseltine. It seemed as if, in obedience to her natural warm-hearted method of welcoming any one and every one to an audience, the Queen would have gone forward to the centre of the saloon. But after the first step she drew back and stood at bay, her head a little to one side and a little bent, as if she watched the tactics of an attacking foe. Mr. Brougham carried off the situation with something of a high hand. She had often told June that he was one of those men towards whom she found it impossible to maintain

ill-humour or reserve, for his natural coolness and temerity, intensified by the nature of his profession, invested him with an irritating power of disregarding the moods of others. Hence he was a man with whom both reserve and its fellow, dignity, were impossible for such a woman.

For this reason the Queen chose other weapons to gain her end. She remained standing, and so maintained formality; she ordered fresh coffee, kept her suite in a distant circle, but not so far off that she could not flash a remark to them if she wished it, and with the air of giving Mr. Brougham a special reception, merely pelted him with a hundred merry, useless questions about the party, his family, and the newest London plays and lotteries. Presently she sent for her box of treasures, as she called it—a chest containing garments and curios gathered on her journeys. She presented him with a Turkish fez, which she insisted on his donning then and there to see if it would “fit his head without incommoding the cells in which his wit was stored,” and gave him a brooch of mosaic for his wife. Then, with a yawn, she bade him good-evening, as she was tired with receiving so many friends upon the end of her journey. Not even Mr. Brougham could disobey this dismissal direct, and he backed wryly from her presence, accompanied by the Irishman. A moment later the Queen withdrew, and the company scattered, the men to lounge at the street door. Brunette, the Queen’s maid, went to June’s apartment with a note. It was the Queen’s hand which wrote, “Be ready in half an hour.” This room opened on to a gallery that ran round the house, and looked upon the vestibule below. Two men were there—the two couriers.

“It is done,” she heard from the rueful Vassali. “We are sent away by this accursed Irish adventurer.”

“My dear Vassali,” replied the other, “she will come back again. I am assured of that. If not, she will send for us. As for me, questions of State, my friend—of State, you understand—render my absence as indispensable at this crisis as my support has been necessary to the Queen on the Continent. The Irishman is merely her slave. We”—he slapped his chest—“are her friends, her confidants.”

Yet it was strange that he should start as a shadow darkened the door immediately behind him.

“Well said, sir, well said,” responded Mr. Heseltine, in English, with irony. “The parting of friends is one of those ‘natural shocks’ which is none the less easy to support because it is natural that those strange accidents that cause an

unexpected and gratuitous heartache. Gentlemen"—he offered his hand politely—"I regret deeply to tell you that your equipage waits, and that the Countess Oldi has already taken a heartbroken adieu of the Queen."

Long before the Angelus sounded, Mr. Brougham, who stood at the window of his lodging on the Calais road while he discussed a modification of the proposal of the Government with its perplexed and perturbed emissary, saw the Queen's carriages roll by. His fist crashed through the window as Lord Hutchinson sprang to his side. The landlord heard the sound of broken glass, and came up with exclamations; but he could get no answer from the two English politicians who gazed stupidly at each other, while one absently twiddled the paper on which he had been writing in his nerveless fingers.

The horses were fresh, the roads admirable. It was barely dusk on that June night when the little remnant of the once flamboyant cavalcade that had left Rome rattled into straggling Calais. The scarlet trappings had disappeared, the circus ponies had been exchanged for hired post-horses, and only the bastardella and the landaulet, with a baggage-cart, remained. A small sailing vessel, with the French flag, lay some way from the jetty, and not far off a larger packet was moored. After a heated discussion, it was decided, in place of the French vessel, to charter this one, for she bore at least the name of a prince and flew the British pennon. The alderman was pompously wrathful because no rowing boats were ready to embark the party. Those that were available had been stowed away, and others were full of fish. He paraded the jetty, giving many contradictory orders. The Queen sat on a rough stool that belonged to the men who mended nets. Lady Anne stood by her in her usual grim silence. For the last time Heseltine threw his weight into the scale.

"The night brings counsel," he said slowly; "the things that are easy to do and seem so simple are often the very worst factor in our fates. If you would but wait—but sleep here this night——"

"I will sleep on the boat. It is enough"—and he fell back in silence. "Never mind," she cried, running to the head of the steps, at the foot of which the shallop lay, "I do not want cushions. I do not mind if it is full of herrings."

She ran down the slippery stair, and jumped in without assistance. The alderman followed with care, and Heseltine, who took an oar, deposited him in the bows.

The deck of the little vessel was clean enough. There was

no state cabin, and only a little shelter on deck. Below, the cargo of silk and wine filled most of the space. The maids grumbled, and Lady Anne, who had already had enough of a tossing on the previous night, wore a piteous air when she saw the accommodation offered; but the Queen ran about looking into the holes and corners with a glad inquisitiveness. She insisted that her ladies should have the bigger of the three little cabins, and laughed at all protests. Presently she grew weary, threw off her plumed gipsy bonnet, had a mattress placed on the floor of her room, and flung herself down upon it like a tired child.

She lay there fast asleep, her cheek upon her hand, when June noiselessly opened the door to see if she required assistance or attention.

Lady Anne, bemoaning the indignities put upon the Queen by the Parliament, while, in effect, more offended at the discomforts to which she herself was exposed as follower of a debatable cause, lamented in the other cabin, and the maids said French prayers for their safety on the deep, screaming resolutely at the rattle of every chain.

June put on her cloak and travelling hood and stole to the deck. The captain of the *Prince Leopold*, a kindly Yorkshire man, showed her a spot in which she might sit with less discomfort than elsewhere. She crouched unnoticed in a sheltered corner. The crew were very busy. She sank presently into a drowsy, half-conscious posture and slipped, till her head found a pillow on a coil of clean ragged rope. In her dream the deck seemed crowded with harlequins, couriers, circus horses, ballet dancers, furies, and lost shades. All of them laughed at her and pointed. Suddenly they shrank, as there parted the crowd a figure with the lyre of Orpheus, who, while turning away his head, took off his cloak and wrapped it round her tenderly; and his face was the face of Stephen Heseltine. Then all the fantastic crowd laughed, and she started up wildly, to chase them in her anger.

"It is all safe," said the voice which always seemed like a pledge that the stars still pursued their stately courses and that not a sparrow fell undestined. "I came only to see that the dew had not visited you too heavily."

"Have we started?"

"Two hours ago, and the wind has just begun to favour us. It is nearly four. By six we shall breakfast in England."

* * * * *

It was not to be avoided that the Queen should enter

London publicly with her champion of the City. At Dover, where the thunder of loyal cannon startled her Majesty into an excitement which she could not disguise and a joyous surprise which she took no pains to conceal, the coach of the alderman with four greys and scarlet postilions was drawn up on the quay.

Touched by the magnificent way in which he arranged such details, she could not do otherwise than give him the place on her left hand, opposite the horses, when they started at nightfall on the journey to London. But it seemed that she was shy at first of causing any sensation, and she chose to walk from the quay to the hotel leaning on Willie Austin's arm, thereby leaving many more mouths agape than she would have done had she merely smiled on her supporters from the windows of a carriage. At Canterbury the torches of the enthusiastic citizens made the horses restive, and one after another stopped the equipage to present felicitations and kiss her hand. At Canterbury she was for posting straight on, but, out of pity for her weary people, consented to stay the night.

Further along the route, on the next day, arches were displayed and people hung gay cloths in the windows. The Queen threw a triumphant look at Mr. Heseltine as he rode on her right.

"You see," she said, "you see. And after all your fears, too, my dear friend."

Ten miles further the villages were duller. The news evidently had not reached them. At one place they had to wait while a local mayor's coach passed them. The alderman's coachman shouted that he drove the Queen, and his rival merely laughed and flung a jest that made poor Willie Austin blush purple.

"It does not matter," said the Queen, who heard it. "How shall they know, when all has been settled so quickly?"

She had the hood, which had been raised for the dust, let down. She looked eagerly from side to side for a greeting. There was none. Only a row of ragged children sitting on a paling by a goose-green waved their hats at sight of the red postilions. Through Rochester they would have passed at a gallop, but the postboys of the town, with laugh and shout, unharnessed the greys and drew the Queen through the town. At Gravesend once more excitement quickened, and at Dartford carts and men on horseback—here a stray squire, there a merchant or a farmer—fell in behind, with a shout for her Majesty. To these ten or twelve champions was quickly

added another dozen, and another, till at last the Queen's voluntary body-guard numbered some two hundred. At sight of the crew the Irishman swore, and he wished that the alderman's crimson visage were anywhere but next to the Queen's person. Hieronymous, the chamberlain, who refused to divest himself of his Greek turban, sat on the box of the Queen's coach with the air of an emperor; and thus the Queen and her people, and the rag-tag of the wharves and villages from Wapping to Westminster, came, on the sixth day of June, to the threshold of that London in which princes and statesmen played the game of Government. Before Westminster Bridge, then, they halted, for the Queen, still strong in her purpose of making open demand for a suitable residence, was bent upon driving to St. James's.

"So far, I am but a guest of the King, and dependent on his bounty," she said, "since the provision made for the Princess of Wales does not give the Queen one copper coin—not so much as to buy her a stocking; and for many years it is the custom to house the King's guests at St. James's."

"And what if the guards have orders to refuse you, madam?" warned Heseltine. "The mob will only offer to drag your carriage to Carlton House, further along the road. What then? You will appear to beg hospitality."

The alderman settled it at last by placing his Mayfair house in North Audley Street at her Majesty's disposal. A fresh crowd gathered, for in London news runs like the flash of phosphorus along a wave. By the time they reached Pall Mall, fresh horsemen, as well as sparkling private equipages, had fallen into the procession, which was thickly fringed by shouting foot passengers. The three coachmen whipped up their horses almost to a mad pace, till the police interfered; but he who sat on the box behind the four greys escaped them in the discussion, and when the mob poured at last into North Audley Street, the alderman's coach and postilions were safely stabled, and the Queen, with a strange, half-scared, half-elated, expression, listened in an inner room to the din. It grew so loud at last that the alderman, with tears in his eyes, besought her to go to the window and bow, for fear the people should break his windows out of joy.

Stephen Heseltine did not wait till the crowd dispersed, but rode to Westminster to give formal notice of the Queen's arrival.

He did not return till the evening of the next day, and

she saw from his face that he had something to deliver. She motioned the rest away, but when they had gone she stood irresolute.

"Are you strong enough to hear me now?" he asked, with such gentleness that it unnerved her.

She quailed for a moment. A cheer, and then another, broke out in the street. She rallied, walked to the window and drank in the sound, slipped down to a kneeling posture, and laid her head on the sill, covering her face.

"My child—my little daughter! She would have put her arms round me now. But I must go to it alone—the old fight."

She rose proudly, and closed the window before he could reach it; she still stood, looking out upon the dusk and the tumult. When he reached the door handle, she turned round sharply.

"Do not leave me," she ordered. Her figure swayed. "Call no one," she added, seeing that he looked for a handbell.

He put her into a chair and waited. She pointed to the portfolio; he brought it. He opened it and read, while her fingers clasped the arms of her chair more tightly.

"Is that all?"

"All."

"You were right to send back Bergami. You are always right"—she gave a little piteous smile—"but it is the way you order me about that makes me fiery."

She almost laughed.

"I fear I was rough-and-ready, as always, on this point; but I had letters from Mr. Brougham which made this proceeding absolutely necessary."

"My poor Bergami! It would have made him vainer than before to be dignified as the co—co—I do not know what your legal word is—in such a divorce *procès* as this."

She began to laugh. It was the same bitter laughter to which the beams of her innocent cottage in Bayswater had so often vibrated.

Mr. Heseltine's impassiveness quelled it.

"When did the message go to Parliament?" she asked at last.

"To-day."

"The King my husband was always a very punctual man. He did not like to wait long. He was always impatient about everything."

But her indignation grew, and her English stumbled in the old way.

"By what means do de King propose to contrive dis *procès* against me?"

"By that which is contained in a sealed satchel placed before both Houses. No one has yet had the courage to break the seal."

"Ah? De poor papas of the Cabinet are afraid? Den I will show dem myself. Tell dem I will break de seal."

She waved her hand lightly, and went towards the door. On the threshold she stayed and held out her hand.

"De old struggle," she cried piteously—"de old——"

"And ever new," he replied, flinging courage into his eyes and voice.

CHAPTER XIII

A MULTITUDE OF COUNCILLORS

THE days that followed were the days of the Green Bag. A small thing enough, and, to the eye, as innocent as my lady's reticule, but it held that which purported to be the true reputation of the Queen Consort of the English Throne not a hundred years ago. And the chest of Pandora never let more malice into the world than did this emerald pouch which the King confided to his Ministers, and which, had they been their own masters, the greater part would not have been touched even with a pair of tongs. But it was there, like a nasty dun, of which the immortality is only confirmed by consignment to the rubbish heap, and so no delay availed their lordships, though they sniffed warily on approach, as one sniffs at a bunch of evil-smelling herbs.

Fourteen days did London wait for the debouching of its contents, and fourteen days did men and women feed on conjecture and ask one another whether the gazettes would not quickly announce a Royal reconciliation and a Drawing-room. The mob, recking little of either, hugged an old cause out of mere childish love of sport and sympathy with the oppressed, while guilds and associations of quaint and sober institution published addresses of welcome to the Queen. Mr. Brougham's coach might as well have been stabled at the alderman's house, for it stood daily at the door for many an hour, while Stephen Heseltine was busy far into the autumn nights with his pen, and never left the house but to go to St. Stephen's for the latest news.

Fourteen days did the Queen dwell sleepless, alert, appallingly vivacious. There was not one of her friends to whom

she did not talk long and eagerly of her state, and to many she did such pathetic acts of kindness as a condemned prisoner might do to those near him, bringing tears to the eyes which, nevertheless, cannot shed them. The child of one of her grooms sickened unto death, and she watched by it all night, carrying it to and fro in her arms in her own parlour to soothe it while the mother slept. Stephen, surprised by a light under the door, knocked and entered.

"Give it to me, madam," he said peremptorily, and she yielded.

It was with a kind of fascination that she watched him, man of debate and creature of combat, swing from one end of the room to the other with his burden till a peace fell upon the room.

These days of uncertainty were happy ones for those whose fortunes hung upon Carlton House or the reverse, for these, like all people whose skins are safe, could parade their partisanship or their comments to their own glorification. "There goes my Lord So-and-so. He is laying heavy odds on the imminence of a trial," was the remark of the unknown in the street to others in equal obscurity; or, "That was my Lady C.'s coach. She knows more about the Queen than Lord Erskine himself, for she has private advices, they say;" or, again, "Lady Hertford's equipage stops the way, did you say? Aha! She has greased her loaf on the right side, be sure."

Many of these notable Court hacks came to present their duty at the house in North Audley Street, and the Queen was for seeing them all, had she been allowed, but Heseltine turned the alderman into a dragon of the ante-room, which served all purposes well, and made King Frog prouder than ever.

Lady Curragh brought her boy, now a blithe, vivid creature of twelve, to make his first bow to the Queen, and if Stephen needed a sign that his friend's heart had turned to his cause, it was surely given when Molly offered her only child to be the Queen's page. Caroline of Brunswick shook her head at first.

"Fie! You send your son for his first cruise wid Mrs. Jonah on board," she said in that half-fierce, half-jesting way which showed how the bitter years had scored and seared her. "Now, the boy shall decide," she said, covering the painful pause, during which her visitor sought for the right word. "Come here, little master."

The boy left his mother and went to the Queen, standing before her with his pretty little legs planted sturdily and slightly apart.

"On your knees, sir," commanded his mother, while the boy blushed at his gawkiness.

"Oh no," laughed the Queen; "I like him so—it is charming. I love independence. Now, my boy, do you want to throw in your lot with Mrs. Jonah or with the King?"

"If she is as kind as Kitty the housekeeper at Curragh, I'd as lief go with the lady, ma'am."

"But the King will be very kind to you."

"I saw him once in Dublin," said the child. "He beat his horse when it was frightened."

"But supposing Mrs. Jonah is thrown into the sea."

He looked puzzled, not understanding her meaning. Then his face brightened.

"Mr. Troomer, papa's chaplain, says that God destined Jonah for great things beyond his fellows, ma'am, and that if it had not been so, the whale would never have been honoured by having a holy man in its belly."

The whole room laughed, and the Queen kissed him, greatly to his secret annoyance, for his Uncle Denis had told him that he was now coming to an age to offer kisses and sue for them, and not to receive them in mere patronage.

* * * * *

And still the feverish midsummer mounted to its height, and still in every book of Church prayers and praise a black mark, by order of the King, lay against the name of his wife; but those that durst not cry her name in the Liturgy said it below their breath, despite all the refusal of the King and the Commons, backed by the statesman-divine whom the less discreet of the Queen's supporters christened "My Lord Cantwell."

Again and yet again the Queen urged the point, till one day Mr. Brougham, weary of editing her appeals to the King, who would not receive them, turned to her in almost savage deprecation.

"It is a strange thing, madam," he said, with the ironical reverence which he used so well a month later in the House upon her enemies, "that you should fall to the level of other women in this matter—the least which concerns your true happiness. But women, madam, would fling their lives away rather than fancy themselves shut out by a rubric. 'Tis surely a sheer superstition."

"Pho! I do not care. The King has done this to hurt me. He has done more. On the Continent they think already I am excommunicate."

He answered her with a keen ironical glance, and said that

he "rejoiced to find a woman and a Queen so honest as to give the true reason."

"Pho!" she cried again, "you have only got one of my reasons. De chief is dat I *like* to be prayed for."

And Mr. Brougham was quickly forgiven when he replied that he was "better as a fighter than as a bedesman, and left that to her other friends," meaning the Irishman.

The mere business of those days which kept the gentlemen of Westminster so occupied, passed into Hansard long since—how for many days the Queen played at ball with the proposals of the Commons; how she flung back entreaty and suggestion with her own conditions added thereto; how she clamoured bravely for public investigation of her case and for a speedy settlement of her estate and rank; how she proposed to stand once more on trial for her virtue before the nation; how the Lords, pushed by the responsibility of accusation which the King shifted so easily from his own neck to theirs, framed a Bill which should establish the guilt of the Queen upon the sifting of the noisome testimony of the sealed pouch aforesaid; how Mr. Brougham fenced with the Commons, and how gallantly Mr. Canning aided his tactics, though, to be sure, it would not have pleased the pugilist lawyer to think of himself as otherwise than an independent champion. Moreover there was other business quite as official, though more lurid and sensational, of which blue-books surely also hold record, as we shall see hereafter.

Since no intimation came from Carlton House or St. Stephen's offering the Queen an honourable and decent shelter, she chose to withdraw some little way from the town, and her choice fell upon Brandenburgh House, of which the pleasant gardens by the river in Hammersmith took her fancy. Here, in the apartments on which the garish taste of the late Margravine of Anspach—a laughter-loving creature—had left its mark, the Queen could summon about her at least the semblance of a palace, and, with such servants as she had, could give audience with proper dignity at the end of a long vista of rooms to the heterogeneous visitors who pressed upon her. Here, again, both her secretary and the alderman would have placed stiffer barricades about her. She would not hear of it, and when the voice of the hostile journals (at the head of which *John Bull* fattened on the proceeds of its gross pasquinades) made fun of her little Court, she merely clapped her hands at the wit, and said that there were no clowns like English clowns, for there was no mistaking their jokes. When one contributor stooped so far

as to deride an honest Company of Braziers for doing homage at Hammersmith, and said they would "find more brass than they carried," she asked him to dinner and wrote the invitation in her own hand, assuring her guest that she had a great desire to make the acquaintance of one who was so good an alchemist as to be able to convert the metal named, in which he held a monopoly, directly into that one which it only resembles on the surface—meaning the good gold guineas paid to him for his scurrility. She sealed the letter with a roguish smile, scoffing at Lady Anne's grim disapproval.

"One must disarm de villain wid a smile, *ma chère*," she said. "It is de only weapon for a solitary woman."

June smiled in secret, for she knew that the letter would travel no further than the bureau next door, where some one exercised a silent censorship.

There were times when the Queen sighed for the friendly hand-clasp of a kinsman or woman. True, the Duke of Sussex appeared late one night, and once His Grace of York visited her by the river; but it gave her little comfort, for their Royal Highnesses manifestly came by stealth, and the Princesses neither wrote nor called. Yet no bitterness fell from her Majesty's lips.

"*Sans rancune*," she answered, when the alderman's lady, jocund and obsequious like her lord, expressed her indignation at such insulting and cruel treatment. "*Sans rancune*, Mrs. Wood. Come, we will drive out and forget it."

Nevertheless, an evil fate truly pursued the Queen, for the coach had not gone two miles along the western road when the liveries of the Duke of Gloucester could be seen approaching through the dust. The Queen's coachman saw it, and saw, too, that the road narrowed at a point half-way between the two cavalcades, for which reason he touched up his horses and was first in the field, forcing the Gloucester coach to make such a sharp halt beyond this little gorge that the horses were pulled back on to their haunches. This delighted the gentlemen on horseback who had followed the Queen's equipage. They roared at the Duchess's footmen to uncover and stand to attention, and they cantered forward, while one, whose rashness got the better of his manners, flung the cap of the nearest of her grooms in the road. Instantly, as it seemed, men on foot and men in the saddle seemed to mingle inextricably with oaths and whip-crackings. One moment of panic, and then each driver urged his horses forward. In the Gloucester coach sat a mute creature with head stiffly

turned away, and the head was the head of her Majesty's cousin-in-law, Princess Sophia, who durst not show how her face flushed and her lips longed to speak some word of affectionate greeting.

All through the dog days the Queen was closeted long with Mr. Brougham and her Irish secretary, and as the burning hours moved on the King was busy too, while his carpenters worked ceaselessly with nail and screw and sturdy white planks on the river bank by Westminster Bridge. The wooden walls grew, foot by foot, till you could see nothing which passed between the Bridge and Westminster Hall. The cabinet-makers who were left to finish the partitions in the enclosure swore that a most unholy smell of garlic came from a shed which was newly fitted for a porter, while men with curling moustachios and silly earrings arrived by night, and with threats and cajoling were driven in a file up the stone stairs from the river by the captain of the gig that landed them. Strange, too, was it that two of the King's gunboats, sprung from no one knew where, had taken up a permanent station before dawn opposite the stairs. Some of these things, if only for the magnificent cost of them to the State, are duly ledgered ; but no state record tells how the mob, which never quite left the Bridge during the weeks before the first reading of the famous Bill of Pains and Penalties, itched with the rage of Nessus—or, as my Lord Albemarle of that day put it, danced about that wooden tenement "like a cat about the cage of a canary." Again, though the petty accounts of Carlton House may show that the King, full of consideration towards his paid spies and perjured witnesses, sent his own *chefs* to cater for the Italian stomach, only the few who were suffered to attend them could tell of the merry sports and kitchen balls which these base hirelings enjoyed during their polite imprisonment.

CHAPTER XIV

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

THE upshot of the long consultations of Mr. Denman, Dr. Lushington, and Mr. Brougham in the garden at Hammersmith was clear enough to the Queen's household when the order came to pack goods and chattels for removal to No. 15, St. James's Square, which Lady Francis had placed at her Majesty's disposal, should the conduct of her business require

her presence within easy call of St. Stephen's. One evening the alderman—on guard, as usual, against visitors—approached, with his customary proud obsequiousness, a tall gentleman who leapt out of a chaise and quietly set aside the protests of the footmen. The visitor, who took the alderman for a steward, grew irritable at his pompous refusal of access to the Queen. His voice was heard by June, who ran to the vestibule to stop the commotion.

In another instant she found both her hands grasped by Mr. Canning.

"You?" she cried warmly. "But where have you been these days? We lacked you in our counsels."

"This is Brougham's affair," he said, with some irony. "He has not forgiven me for sending the Queen (so he calls it) away from England in '14. He would consider my interference impudent now."

"Mr. Brougham's affair? It is yours as much."

"So much so that I have laid my conscience before the King," he answered quickly, as if he expected her misconception. "Will you take me to the Queen?"

She led the way to the room in which her Majesty sat while Mr. Brougham and Stephen Heseltine explained to her their scheme, and prepared her case. The great lawyer gave his Parliamentary colleague a glance of withering suspicion, but the Queen received him with a happy exclamation of relief, and Stephen wrung his hand.

"Madam," said Mr. Canning, "I have been silent towards you these many days, to all seeming, and many tongues have been busy upon it. Only to you would I clear myself from cowardice. I laid my seals of office at the feet of his Majesty yesterday. He has been good enough to refuse to receive them. I pressed for leave of absence. To my surprise he has given it. I leave England to-night, and, lest you should think me a runaway and a coward, I come to tell you myself that no power in heaven and earth shall bring me to aid the grievous business which the two Houses have in hand, and that since I cannot assist your Majesty further at this crisis with my poor brains, I rejoice, for a while at least, to sever my connection, both as man and politician, with a country in which such shame as this is put upon her defenceless Queen."

"I have not blamed you," said the Queen; "and the King does very well and wisely to you. I can bless him for that."

She spoke for a few minutes with him on formal topics, and

then Mr. Canning knelt and kissed both her hands. On the threshold he stood to wave his hat.

"Gentlemen," he said, "God save the Queen of England."

And with that he was gone, while Caroline stood looking after him.

An hour later she left the room as gaily as a child let out of school.

"They ask me such terrible questions," she complained to June. "I have to send *la dragonne* out of the room, or she would never survive it all. Now we will go to the theatre and amuse ourselves."

But Heseltine stopped it as inadvisable.

"There is much to face," he said, "and a popular exhibition of feeling to-night might cause a riot, which would only do you harm."

"But I cannot remain a prisoner here with nothing but *à malin* Brougham and the solemn Mr. Denman to speak to—to say nothing of your stiff Puritan face, my dear friend, and my dyspeptic first lady of the bedchamber. And June, Lady Ibbs, even she no longer pretends to be gay. Why, I am the criminal, and yet I am gayer than all!"

"I only want you to spare yourself, for the enemy opens fire very soon."

She started, and then laughed at herself for it.

"Well," she said, "how soon?"

"Mr. Denman wishes you to be ready for Thursday."

"I have just forty-eight hours. Very well, but I will be happy. We will go to a theatre all the same."

But it was only a piece of defiance. She spent the evening alone with June after dinner. She rearranged all the house, till not a Wedgwood piece was left untouched. Then, though the evening was very warm, she ordered a brazier to be lit. She sent for some wax such as locksmiths use, and with a little silver knife she carved it into shapes, talking ceaselessly to her companion all the while.

"Dis Irishman," she said angrily, "he loves to criticise and give advice. I *detest* people who give advice," and the little silver knife dug fiercely into the wax. "But," she went on, "he is maddening. Dere are times when I never want to see him again. I send him away, and when he is away"—she dropped the knife and the lump of wax, and her hands clasped and unclasped—"when he is away, *mein Gott!* my head is full of noding but de dreadful things which may happen to him. Why? It is absurd. I laugh at it."

She took up the wax again, and began to shape it. A head and shoulders, vague at first, emerged from the mass.

"How old do I look?" she said suddenly, lifting her head from her work; she did not wait for an answer. "I am much over forty," she said, "and he is thirty-six. How young he is—my arch-priest, as I call him!"

She gave a little sigh.

Such talk as this always set June's nerves quivering. It was fortunate that the Queen rattled on.

"Bah! how good he is! He is too good. He makes me angry."

A silence, and from the wax grew a figure in Court breeches and cutaway coat.

"If de monster does divorce me," said the Queen, flying off at a tangent, "I do not care. I am innocent." She caught June's hand. "Tell me, does he—you know who—believe it?"

"Most faithfully."

The Queen gave a sigh like a child.

"I have been very bad and naughty. I have let him think all sorts of things. I do not care what any one else says. And if the Lords have been bought by the King, and do condemn me, I shall be free, free to——"

She dropped her tools again for a moment, and put her hand hurriedly up to her face.

"He is a Catholic," she went on. "Dey look wid disfavour upon a woman who is 'put away.'"

She took up a fresh piece of wax and began to knead it absently, but grew interested. The doll was quickly finished.

"Lend me your pincushion," she said.

She took the two figures, and in one she put a dozen steel skewers.

"Dat is George," she said. "Look at his double chin; it is exactly like him. I hope de pins are very pointed. Now for Caroline."

She put a few touches to the other doll. Another fragment of wax was speedily fashioned into a circlet with spikes.

"I will wear a better coronet dan dat," she said merrily, and planted the dolls on the brazier with the circlet between them.

She went down on her knees before the brazier, as eager as a maid that roasts chestnuts on All Hallows' E'en. The wax crown lost its balance immediately, and fell into a scarlet gulf. She gave a little cry; but the wax king's arms were already melted. He sank to his stumps, and fell headlong after the circlet. The other doll burnt slowly, with sullen sputtering.

"It is victory," she said, springing to her feet. "Victory, though it will cost much."

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Forty-eight hours after the wax dummies frizzled their hearts out on the live coals, the Queen stood in her apartment with her ladies. Now that her hour was come, a great dignity and calm possessed her. She appeared as indifferent to that which was before her as if it were some dull errand of utility in which she regarded personal activity as something entirely superfluous. She laughed when June wished to braid her hair afresh, because, to her critical eye, the hands of Brunette had twisted the strands carelessly. For Brunette had trembled all the while, and when the Queen told her to be courageous, only the maid knew why her mistress's kind words were like darts to her.

Nothing would persuade her Majesty to lay aside her great black gipsy hat with tossing plumes for the Parisian turban recommended by the alderman's lady.

"No, no," she said sharply; "no one at least can divorce me from my hat."

It was June whose quick, quiet fingers softened the hard brim by fastening to it a long white veil, and she who clasped and arranged the simple black robe which, since the death of her child, the Queen always wore.

The little ormolu timepiece in the dressing-room pointed to the hour at which Mr. Brougham had requested her Majesty to be ready to drive to the House of Lords. She sent June to summon Lady Anne, and meanwhile she went down alone to the little parlour in which so many days had been spent over weary and gruesome consultation.

Stephen Heseltine saw the coaches for the party wheeling in the Square, and went to prepare her.

"I have come here to rest and think," she said, without looking at him.

"Is it well that you should think?"

She nodded lightly, but did not turn her head.

"My God!" she exclaimed in a sudden frenzy, "how I dread it!"

"You shall not stay a moment longer than formality demands. Oh!" he went on, kneeling by her chair, "if I could but be your ears and your eyes you should hear and see nothing that could even cause you a scratch. But I will do all that I can to shield you."

He took her hand. There was here a silence as if the earth itself had ceased to move, and the planets listened. They were but man and woman, with neither rank nor race difference between them, two human beings, of whom the weaker was to face the most cruel ordeal in the world.

She shook her head.

"You mistake me," she said. "It is not this"—she pointed out of the window towards Westminster—"that I dread. This is only like a deep plunge; the breath goes for a moment—ah!—and then it is over. One cares no more. It is the *afterwards*, the loneliness. For if the Lords paint me to all the world with a big 'A,' I am lonely as before, and yet if I am made really Queen, I am lonely just the same." She bent towards him, while he still held her hand. "Have you never——?" She could not say the word.

If ever a strong and just man is tempted, he is tempted in such a moment through sheer pity. Stephen Heseltine would have surely laid down his life to take to his heart this Queen of Tragedy. To lie would have been one part of duty. His mind fought desperately lest this jesuitical notion should master him. He throttled the lying suggestion, and conquered.

"I have never feared solitude," he said, in a clear, level voice, as if he stated some ordinary fact, "though my life, till I gave it to your service, was crowded with the things that do not lead to the graces of life,—kinship or comradeship."

"Then some day you will know the whole loneliness of a woman, and you will bless your knowledge, for it will give you all that you lack."

"My dear mistress," he said, and looked frankly up into her face, for now he knew that her danger and his was momentarily past.

She put her hands lightly on his shoulders, and stooped and kissed him on the forehead, and then for an instant he folded her hands reverently to his heart. At the near sound of wheels she started to her feet, while he opened the door and called little Denis Curragh to bear her fan and scarf.

The alderman was for having the carriage open, but the Queen was peremptory. She waited till all the rest were in their places, and then Mr. Heseltine handed her in.

"Do I look like a criminal?" she whispered jestingly.

"Your servant, madam, is a hundred times proud of his mistress."

CHAPTER XV

DENIS THE PAGE RIDES IN STATE

THOSE who knew that her name spelt chameleon wondered little at the sad beauty that shone in the face of Caroline of Brunswick on that August day, when, clad with extreme simplicity, she entered the House of Lords for the first reading of the Bill of Pains and Penalties. That Bill was to determine the truth of the testimony, secret and public, brought against her for the second time since she came to be the bride of the First Prince of England. For near upon a quarter of a century she had cried for justice, for many years had her cry come back into her face, and now the combatants were close to each other at last. But it was not in honourable duel that the oppressor dared face the oppressed. The open lists, the combat face to face, which Heseltine had foretold, was not to be. Hate is a thing which slashes its object from behind the arras, and so the Regent, now Fourth of the Georges, hid behind the crackling deed which bore the indictment of his wife on the witness of the Green Bag evidence, and the proposal for her degradation from the estate of Queen and wife. So, while all the world knew who was her prosecutor, the law acknowledged no plaintiff proper, and her counsellors were as men who fight always against an ambushed enemy.

She was pale on this day, but her lips were red and her eyes bright and steady. Her dress gave her additional height, and she walked alone, stopping half-way along the crimson gangway to speak to the little lad who smiled up at her and took his dismissal at her chair.

She seemed scarcely conscious of anything after that, and took no notice when the alderman, longing to flaunt himself in public as her defender, dexterously avoided the onslaught of the Irishman, and slipped into a seat next to her. Through Heseltine's contriving, June secured a seat at right angles, and watched her mistress from the moment that the Speaker read out the shameful Bill, until at sight of her erstwhile chamberlain, the Milanese Majocchi, in the witness-box, the Queen rose to her feet with a low and bitter cry of "Traitor," and, apparently afraid that she would break down completely, left the assembly and drove home in a dreadful silence. On the seventh day, it might be, of the examination of the King's vile witnesses, Stephen Heseltine, white with disgust, returned

early from Westminster, and found June ready to accompany some lady about the Princess to the House.

"You must not go," he said briefly, and took her aside. "Your companion may do as she chooses. She is, by her looks, tough enough for any inferno—but you——"

"I do not wish it," she said. "I can serve the Queen as well away."

He thanked her gravely, as if for some act of personal service, while, in the happy secrecy of her closet, she marvelled at herself for this strange submission. Yet by this slight accident, on which neither touched again (though a dozen times it was on the tip of his tongue to give her his deepest reason), the two came to a fuller knowledge of each other than they had before enjoyed, in spite of the episode at Leghorn, and the many strange and intimate situations into which the unreserve and impulse of their sad mistress threw her friends and servants. Thus, all that which went on at St. Stephen's filtered through Heseltine, and June learnt from her friend's lips day by day the whole of that lurid battle of counsel and prosecution, and the story of the unsavoury calumny brought against the First Lady of the Realm on account of her foolish courier, Bergami.

On some days the Queen would stay many hours listening to the pleading and the cross-questioning as if the victim of it all were a stranger, and now and again would turn with a grotesque air of amusement to her friends at some new and unexpected distortion of her playful acts—like a man who reads his own signature backwards in a glass. At other times she would drive for hours and hours along the quieter roads, scarcely speaking, never smiling, but with a continual hunger in her eyes. In the house in St. James's Square, from the scullion to the alderman's grooms (who hung about the kitchens, as much in love with the savour of things Royal as their master), the cause possessed every mind, and the tension was that of a beleaguered city.

As the weeks went on, Heseltine, who did not know that he watched June so closely that he could detect the variation in her appearance of the curve of the smallest tress, saw the glow strengthening in her cheeks. She never met him now but with eager parted lips, as one who hangs upon the war gazettes. He challenged her upon it, and feared that she cherished unchristian vindictiveness, at which she feigned to be angry.

"Ask yourself," she retorted, "if the zest of this struggle did not carry you away long since. For me, it has entered into my blood, and feeds, yet uses me."

"You are a true Celt. Give him anything, a rag—white, or red, or green, it matters not—to fight for, and he will never finish fighting."

"It is enough ; let us talk of the Queen. How does she bear it to-day ?"

He told her how the Queen was still in court, and had been put in high good humour by the way in which Mr. Denman, with his inordinate love of classical parallels, had hit the King in the eye by likening his wife to Nero's Octavia. June learnt too how the mob had armed themselves with long poles with green pouches at the end, into one of which, as it was thrust through the open window of her coach, her Majesty, with a twinkle, dropped an Italian coin that she happened to have in her pocket, a piece which her steward had forgotten to take to the 'Change on her arrival. Sometimes Heseltine's gazette was brief, when June knew that Mr. Solicitor-General (for the King) had excelled himself in that kind of humour which so delights the coarse-grained. On other days, when her friend would come to her with smiling eyes and twitching lips, she guessed that the Queen's counsel (none other than Mr. Brougham) had more than nonplussed the foe. All her Majesty's household chuckled at the indignation with which Madame Oldi (who had been ordered over to England by the Queen's counsel in case her testimony should be needed) sniffed at Mr. Denman's charming statement, based on the authority of our "greatest dramatic author," that the country of the Cæsars was the home of all villainy. And many clean and loyal fellows held their sides over his cannonade against the spies. "Sixthly and lastly," said his worship, quoting from the words of Dogberry the beadle against those who defamed Hero—"sixthly and lastly they have belied a lady ; thirdly, they have verified unjust things ; and, to conclude, they are lying knaves," a dictum the more applicable in the present issue, as he reminded his vast audience, since it was taken from the last act of a comedy called "Much Ado about Nothing."

On the day (it was the forty-sixth of the trial) that Lord Erskine, pleading with heart and soul against the second reading of the Bill of Degradation and Divorce, and exhausted by the strain of this battle of many weeks, fell forward in the middle of his address in a swoon, the Queen returned from the great court with tears in her eyes for the first time in that terrible time. Heseltine told June that when Lord Eldon and the rest carried their colleague into the fresh air, the

Queen begged that she might herself, in the waiting-room set apart for her, tend his lordship till a physician came.

"If you had fainted, dear, clever Mr. Brougham," she said roguishly, even through her agitation, "no one would have believed in it, because you are such a master of fine feelings."

Yet all this debate and contest seemed as nothing when all London hung upon the lips of the Chairman of the Committee of Inquiry as he read the divorce clause of the base Bill. Even here, comedy came to confound tragedy, when Lord King got upon his legs to regret that evil reports, of a nature that the prosecution could not establish, had given a shameful bias to the course of the trial. He therefore begged their lordships to remember that it was said that there were other persons, besides the courier Bergami, with whom the name of an illustrious lady had been coupled. He would remind them that her Majesty had surely been guilty of indecorum at Blackheath with Lord Liverpool, and that she had played at blind man's buff with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "I cannot, I assure your lordships, report the exact time when these extraordinary and indecent proceedings took place," said Lord King, as demurely as any maid; "but it must have been, I think, when the noble earl was out of place, and looking for means to get into office, before the Regency." At which Prosperity Jack, purple in the face, but laughing in spite of himself, growled out, "Never, upon my honour;" to whom Lord King bowed extravagantly, and replied that "This, then, was an instance to the noble earl of the falsity of reports."

So the dial upon the Queen's house in St. James's Square showed its purple shadow-bar day after day, and the Queen rose and ate and slept in a dumbness that was felt by all about her. The two who served her best spoke at last almost in whispers about her. June was secretly delighted when she saw her friend possessed by a righteous rage over this affair, for his practised coolness misled those who knew him less.

Once she went on an errand that took her past the gates of Carlton House, now dubbed by the mob "Nero's Hotel," and met Stephen striding up and down outside it with the air of an incendiary. While he escorted her home his silence loosened her tongue, and she told him at last how that which he longed to do by force she had tried once to do by gentle entreaty. Up to this time she had hidden from him every detail of that strange interview at Kew with the Regent, too proud to flaunt a wound or to play the insulted martyr.

"I was fool enough," she said, "to kneel, to kneel," she laughed bitterly. "And I was well paid for my foolishness."

At the quick turning away of her head, when he looked inquiry, he knew without words the end of her story, and that which had been growing hour by hour in his brain and heart now welled up into a flood which almost swept him away.

"You did this? You?" he said, so moved that he could not do anything but stare and wonder, and went forward to her. But her gesture of deprecation made him cool again, for in some way not to be described she seemed afraid that he should touch too closely on her personal matters. At the same moment she drew her chair nervously a little distance away, and begged to be told all about the day's proceedings, "if, indeed, they were repeatable."

He grew angry with some of the prelates.

"His holy Grace of York has managed his palfrey well," he replied sarcastically, "for while he has made it amble safely past the pitfall of the divorce clause on the one hand, he has saved it on the other from entanglement in the net of popular odium by a splendid and pompous indirect reminder to the King that 'the marriage union imposes a reciprocal obligation on the contracting parties,' which is as good as to say that if she has offended, the King is the cause of it. By heaven! I would rather any day have the coarse gibes of the Solicitor-General on whalebone skirts than his Grace's hedging."

"Yet a Church, even ours——"

"All the Churches are one in their aim, Lady Ibbs," he interrupted.

"Even ours," she persisted, "which you have condemned as grossly indolent in its cures, does well to remind its children, whether kings or linkmen, of this truth. Nor were marriage the sad and soiled bungle that it is painted by a Hogarth if our reverend men went further still, and preached chastity before marriage more loudly."

After the words were uttered, she felt the old shyness that had come upon her in the gallery at Castle Curragh so many years before, but he, glowing to find that her mind was still like the deep pure tarn he had imagined it, boldly spoke, letting her see all his thoughts. So she sat, her hands clasped upon her knees, smiling as women smile who hear a tale oft told, while he spoke humbly and earnestly like one who makes a confession of faith for the first time, and fears to boast of his creed. Of vows and of chastity he spoke, of the romance of brave worldly endeavour, and of the rich

romance of failure—which is greater than the glamour about many successes—of the dignity of the motive and the idea, of the time that should come when to be drunk or free or blasphemous should be as damnable to a man as to a woman, and how, indeed, God made both as pure and sacred as the hill-dew, and demanded of each towards the other a full and perfect homage and adoration. And then she, still smiling, said, "All this I knew long ago."

After this day, both seemed to have passed through a gate into a garden. There was surely a place beyond which neither apprehended. But the difference between them was this—she, looking forward quickly, found once more that perplexing question of "Afterwards?" on her lips, while he went about his daily work for the Queen with fresh courage, and rejoiced that he could hold his dearest wishes in leash, though he fought with them all the while. Thus she suffered and analysed and, so to say, curtained her mind towards him, mindful of the Queen's half-confession to her, and fearful even in thought of hurting a creature so wounded. If she had known how tightly he reined himself when others were by, and how he still questioned her feeling towards him, June might have spared herself many a tossing autumn night. Yet it is hard to make either men or women see that the turning they have taken is a blind alley.

Thus the silences that now interrupted their talks grew longer.

The tenth day of November, 1820, dawned sullenly in a blue fog, which a continuous drizzle could not disperse. On the previous night the Queen and her advisers had been busy.

"We are making a last stand," said Heseltine to June, "she wishes to be heard by counsel."

The next day her Majesty went early to the court. Her secretary returned later than usual. June waited for him. She alone of all the household knew best how far the Queen's advisers had hopes of justice. She watched Heseltine swing along the Square, and could see that his head was bent, as was his way when he knew that a crisis was at hand. He did not come to her parlour straight, but traversed the vestibule several times, as if to steady his mind; when he entered he spoke at first of trivialities, but watched her as she sat with her face in the light.

"How tired you are," he said quickly. "You should be away from all this, and happy. You are a creature made for happiness."

A strange ironical platitude, which men daily utter to women who are not of bone or wood, but of warm flesh and keen spirit.

She answered him by a question.

"It is not yet over," he replied; "the Queen's protest has not yet been named in the House."

"Is she composed?"

"Utterly. It is marvellous. Perhaps the struggle has wearied her. No wonder she is callous after twenty-four years of persecution and insult."

He looked up, and suddenly found that June was regarding him intently with a half-ironical, half-sorrowful expression.

"Callous?" she said—"callous? Good heavens!" and walked impatiently to the window, as if she hoped he would leave the room. At the window she flung up her hands and turned. "Listen," she whispered—"listen. Something happens; I can hear cries and a heavy tramping. Look, they come running this way, tossing their hats. There is some one in the middle of them."

She strained her eyes. Round the furthest corner from Pall Mall the mob swung at a steady march, stamping to a rhythm without words, while those who could not keep step danced along its fringe shrieking, laughing, crying in a breath. Half the crowd surged to the north, half to the south of the Square, but the northern pulled the hardest, and so the rioters marched round with a fine sweep and down towards the Queen's house. Then it was that June gasped with new astonishment, and hurried down the stairs to the door, for there on the shoulders of the crowd was Denis Curragh—Denis hatless, Denis shouting at the top of his little shrill voice, with his arms round the necks of two burly ruffians who chaired him, his page's dress bespattered with rain, while his page's shoes with the scarlet heels half-dipped in mud, dangled on the end of his toes.

"Huzza! Cousin June," he shrilled. "Huzza! Victory! I came to tell you. Huzza!"

Heseltine pushed his way through the crowd.

"Gently, my men," he said. "You'll shake the breath out of the child. Give him to me," and he lifted Denis down on to the doorstep, while the crowd cheered.

The boy pulled a paper out of his vest.

"Read it," roared the crowd, and some shrieked on while others called for quiet, and more yelled to Heseltine to speak. He held up his hand, and there came a quick hush,

"Friends, the majority for the Government in favour of the Bill is so small that the Lords abandon it on the third reading. They have taken your lead, good people. Friends, God save the Queen, now and always!"

Little Denis started the cheer in his high treble, and June slipped her arm round his neck and watched him—a flushed, bright-eyed boy—shouting victory in a contest of which he, happily, had little understanding.

"I stood in the courtyard under the awning talking to my mamma in her carriage," he told them later, "and some one put his head out of a window and said, 'The Queen has won the battle,' and flung me this note for Stephen; and I ran out expecting to hear the guns, and the men put me on their shoulders."

Then he gave a little start, for the Queen, who was close behind, had heard all he said, and kissed him, and this time he felt proud of it.

All that were present remembered how she turned to Heseltine and said nothing, but merely looked long at him, unconscious that the mob shouted for her. The alderman ran in.

"Madam, come," he implored. "They only want just to see you. They are hammering at the door."

She shrank back.

"Go," she said, "all of you, and tell them I am very tired." Then she turned again to Heseltine: "Are you glad?" she said—"are you glad?"

"You know it, madam."

They were alone. She put her hand on his shoulder. What she read in his eyes, and he in hers, no one may tell.

And still the people, her champions, roared her name

"I will go to the balcony," she said.

The yell of jubilation was so intense that she trembled and caught at the balustrade. One fellow began to climb up.

"We cannot see you," they shouted. "We want to see the Queen."

"Throw down those flowers you are wearing," said Heseltine.

She did so.

"More," shouted the crowd.

"Your veil, madam," said happy June, quickly unpinning it. It floated down to the uplifted faces. The wind blew it hither and thither among the bushes of the Square, the people surged as it swayed overhead, and there was a fresh roar as the

mob concentrated where the gauze fell, breaking palings and bushes in its mad rush.

Only an hour later, while the crowd still gathered in a dense mass, into which fresh streams converged, Brunette came to say that all the loyal folk of Bond Street and Pall Mall had candles blazing in every window from cellar to attic, and begged for permission to run out and see the sights.

The words were scarcely uttered when the rockets blazed out in the Green Park and were answered in the Square. Swift tongues of fire flitted through the streets, met others, and made the November fog crimson. Every window blossomed into stars. From all sides came the torches. There was not a gallipot or a scone in St. James's Square (save under the stubborn roof of his Grace of Northumberland and our friend Lord Castlereagh) that was without its wick and tallow. All London became a whirlpool of joy. Again and again stream met counter-stream, and so amicable was the encounter that each would put his arm through his neighbour's, and jog wheresoever the stronger tugged. With flags of silk, pennons of paper, mottoes on transparencies, and wreaths of laurel, London fluttered abroad for three consecutive nights, lit by green fires and blue fires, red fires and yellow fires, and on the third night, as dawn broke, the tramp of feet, like waves, in the squares and parks and highways, lulled the weary household of the Queen to sleep at last.

CHAPTER XVI

A DISSERTATION UPON THE MARKET VALUE OF INNOCENCE

HALF London came to write its name in the guest-book of her Majesty at Brandenburg House, while the winter hurricanes died in the arms of the spring breezes, and the sedge roots of the river below her Hammersmith garden sent up sweet-smelling emerald sword-blades to hide the bleached reeds of a dead and direful year.

The weeks raced, and it seemed as if Caroline of Brunswick took no count of them, while she kept open house, and wore day and night that eager, expectant look that had flamed for an hour in her face on that day in 1814 on which she awaited the splendid guests whom no man could compel to her table—the same look which had come back to her eyes when Stephen Heseltine knelt on the steps at Leghorn and called her Queen.

Innocence, assuredly, is of many degrees. Once, in those halcyon days, in the existence of which a small minority still believes, it was certainly a crystal, unshaped and simple. But the hands of men have carved it about, and chipped its worth in their carving. There is scarcely one that credits it with real transparency. It is become a reprehensible thing—a mixed quantity, more piquant than priceless. Piquant conjecture is the nearest approach to the mood in which the London of 1820 awaited the decision of the Lords upon the Queen's chastity, for faith had very little part in it. If there was chatter before the sentence, there was more after. When the City had shouted itself hoarse in her praise, and the joy-bells of London's cathedral had rung out her thanksgiving, the world went about its business once again. Then it was that individual pipings were heard. The tension was over. People fell upon the innocence of her Majesty and played with it, as children play at stick and ball. They tossed a suggestion into the air, and caught it on the point of their "ifs" and "buts." It is true that many who had hung back now came forward, and her former suite, to whom a regular tribute of civility was now a cheap form of service, hastened to surround her with courtesies. The sprightly Sir William Gell, among others, won his mistress's heart again entirely, while he whispered to June that his "devotion to her Majesty had only stuck, after all, at riding a mule through the Holy Land, and slumbering with strange bedfellows beneath the stars on the plains of Ephesus."

"I wonder," he said archly, "what will be 'Our' next move. A clean slate should give 'Us' new confidence."

Lady Porte, who was near, sniggered in reply that "'Our' slate had certainly been well scrubbed enough in all conscience. She had not known that my Lord Liverpool could have expended so much elbow-grease on it."

Nor was the innocence of Caroline of Brunswick a more vital matter with the mob than with courtiers. The honest mass had done its championing and spent its hot partisanship. With the rest it was not concerned.

Mr. Brougham wore the air of comfortable victory. About his lips lurked a professional glee, easily construed into an impression that the risks had been greater and the triumph more spicy than he had hoped in his wildest dreams. Success and relief, rather than faith and vindicated innocence, were upon his banner. People whispered that only he could have saved her Majesty, but they did not trouble to explain whether he had done it through belief in her, or by sheer use of his

lance against the sot King whom no man loved. These things were hinted with all the "prunes" and "prisms" of the shooting and pinched lips of those whose lives were as rotten as medlars. The strange and sober companies of persons who persistently flooded the Queen's house still formed the butt of society.

"'Tis a pity to see virtue so condensed," cried Lady Conyngham to a gossip, as their horses' heads were forced to turn into a muddy lane in Knightsbridge till the concourse of the Married Ladies, with their spokeswoman, Mrs. Thelwall, had passed along the highway to Brandenburgh House.

"Lawks! yes," cried the other one, with her glass to her eye. "A pinch of it here and there, my dear, would be as refreshing as the new vinaigrettes from Mr. Isaacs's in Marylebone."

"What more can 'We' desire?" whispered Sir William Gell to Mr. Keppel Craven, as they stood on the steps to receive the worthy dames whose gay turbans reared themselves like veritable towers of prudence.

"We?" said Heseltine sharply, for he had overheard the whisper. "We have yet a crown to receive. The homage of those who personate so splendidly the sacredness of the holy estate"—his eye twinkled—"is but a milestone on the way to Westminster Abbey, Sir William."

Later, in the evening shades of the elms by the river, June sat alone and wondered on all these things. Once more she strained her vision into the future, for she told herself now that the time had come to take up her own life. The Queen needed her no longer. By look and word June fancied that her mistress showed that she was tired of her self-appointed lady. More than once had June put strong pressure on herself to keep under control her resentment of the arrogance of certain persons about the Queen, who poisoned her mind daily against those who had borne the heat and burden of a sorry year's service. The alderman was merely amusing; she had no special quarrel with the man whom the exasperated Mr. Brougham styled "ass and alderman, whom men call Thistle Wood," though he proved so prickly a burr to the gentlemen of her Majesty's household.

"Your composure amid this river peace is a reproach upon me for my vindictive thoughts," said Stephen Heseltine, when he came upon June.

She laughed.

"His worship again? Can you not leave baiting him?"

"No; he is always meddlesome, and to-day he has poked his inquisitive fingers just a little too far. I have had to rap

his knuckles ; and yet I am in a dilemma, and cannot afford to chastise him properly."

"Why?"

"He has made a certain discovery about the finances of the Queen—that is, of your share in them. Off he goes like a red rocket to tell Craven and Gell, and to offer to appeal to the public. It is worse than useless."

"But the grant from Parliament?"

"The Queen has refused it."

"On whose advice?"

"Heaven knows! I refused to decide this matter. Technically she did right, for any provision accepted by her apart from her estate as Queen is a tacit acknowledgment that she foregoes the honours of a Queen. Yet debt is debt, whether for a Royal person or a commoner. I have come for your permission to tell her who has stood between her and that."

"No, no, I beg you——"

"Would you prefer that she should hear it from the alderman?"

"Oh! not that. His wife——"

She bit her lips and flushed.

"So it is the buxom burgheress who has been letting forth her venom?"

"She is my daily cross," laughed June; "but what of that? Have you not a rival, too, in the Queen's service? And yet I would rather tackle his lordship than his lady. Her thrusts are those of a bodkin; the crook makes them remembered."

He laid his hand on her arm. The action made her the more self-conscious in that he was a man who never handled a woman, even in the most obvious act of courtesy. His eyes deepened, and a quick change had come over his face. It seemed as if he had raised an invisible visor.

"What have they been saying to you?" he asked sternly.

"Women's bickerings, women's bickerings."

Her tone was light, but she looked away. Then she changed the subject.

"And so you thought I was dreaming? I was thinking of many things—stern necessities. It is strange that you should have been on your way to me, for I had a mind to consult you about my affairs also. The Queen needs me no longer. The great fight was over months ago. Lady Anne is here, and Lady Charlotte Lindsay near at hand, both ready to fall into their places. I am idling away my days and forgetting the

work of—my husband ;” she used the word with a certain proud pathos.

His eyes flashed, and he bent forward, looking intently at her, as if there were something he would give his eyes to know.

She went on hurriedly :

“It is the work he would have loved to do—to go among his people and hear of their lives, and give with both hands. He was so careless of everything but of brightness,” she said, “and he would have shared it with all the world. He would not have had a sick man or a miserable man on his estates, I think.”

She paused and spoke again, while the Irishman kept his eyes on her face.

“I am very old,” she said wearily. “It is as if he had been my son, and as if one day he must come again to claim all of his that I hold in trust.”

Still the man beside her made no sign nor moved his glance.

“It was so strange,” she said, as if she had forgotten his presence—“so strange. He was so young, so eager. He tore my heart in two, and I could not forgive till it was too late, and now his house has only desolate places. But I am not a coward ; I will go and live there.”

“I think you are putting yourself to needless torture at this moment,” he said at last, but his voice sounded dim and remote. “The fight for the Queen’s honour has shattered your nerves. Day by day I have watched you and have seen it. I came here to ask you if——”

She rose abruptly, as if she resented solicitude.

“I too,” he continued, “have work that may call me away at any moment. I can make this a good excuse ; but meanwhile I was going to ask you to stay in my place. I cannot ask it now, for you need rest, and my work must wait.”

“One of us must go,” she answered briefly. “The Queen imagines that in some fashion I am in league with you to persuade her to waive her coronation rights.”

“I know it,” he said, “and moreover——”

The colour deepened in his face, but she grew whiter than before. A little Japanese dog bounded over the grass towards them.

“The Queen !” she said briefly. “Go to her.”

He met their mistress at the turn of an alley, whence the dog had run. The Queen dropped Mr. Craven’s arm and beckoned to Heseltine.

“At last !” she cried. “One would think you were a landscape poet from the way you sit by the river, Mr. Erin. It is

so dull to write verses about vegetables—or must I say vegetation, Mr. Keppel? There, it is all the same, a cabbage or a forget-me-not, unless there is some beautiful nymph in the case.”

“The charming Lady Ibbs, madam,” interposed Mr. Wood, “is sitting by the river.”

“*Ach!* she is a sweet creature,” cried the Queen quickly, “but she is as impenetrable as a *dévoté*. She has eyes, *mein Gott!* that are like lakes, but they are ice-cold lakes like mountain water. Are they not, Mr. Heseltine?”

She took his arm.

“No, no, madam,” said Mr. Craven gallantly, to fill an awkward interval, “mountain water is nearly green. Do you not remember at Como how you challenged me to bring you a string of crystals as green as the spray, and how you won your wager?”

“Ah, how happy we were then!” cried the Queen, and stole a look at the man on whose arm she leant. “But we will be happy again,” she said, with a bright hard little laugh. “*En effet*, Mr. Erin, I want you to see about a new proscenium for my little theatre here. The late Margravine’s taste does not suit me. The cherubs on the drop-scene are just like kobolds. I dream of them at night. There is one that peeps from behind a woollen cloud with a horrible leer, and he calls me ‘Caroline’ in my nightmares—the little insolence! So you must buy me a new proscenium and curtain, and when we have all been to Westminster Abbey, we will have a play to celebrate our victory.”

The alderman coughed.

“I will have a play twice a week,” she said. “We will do Shakespeare. I have learnt a whole play—think of it!—in one morning. Do you think Lady Ibbs will mind doing an old woman’s part? I don’t like to ask her; she frightens me,” she dropped her voice. “She is superhuman; she never seems to lose herself. What is it?”

Caroline of Brunswick looked hard at her escort. The rest had fallen back in some discussion.

“I cannot tell you, madam,” said Heseltine stiffly. “But to turn to the matter of the plays. I suggest your letting the matter slide for the present, until the date for the coronation is at least fixed. We can count upon nothing as yet.”

June came to them across the sward, the dog jumping by her side.

“Look!” said the Queen. “My dog loves her, and you—you like her—but though I have seen tears running down her

face for my sorrows, I never know more of her. She puts on armour—like you."

The dog ran up to his mistress and played, grunting, with her handkerchief, which June rescued.

"Ah! Lady Ibbs. Your ears burn pink, and the rest of you is like a gelder-rose. Quite right; we have been talking of you. I want to act Shakespeare, but our friend here throws cold water upon it; and I fear you will do the same." She raised her voice and turned to the alderman. "I always say, Mr. Wood, that Lady Ibbs ought to rule a convent, and Mr. Heseltine a monastery, and then they could compare notes. It is the proper thing, Mr. Craven, for a destitute Queen to take sanctuary in some holy house of the kind; but I am quite embarrassed—I do not know which to choose."

"A nun is the mother of all sorrows, madam," said Heseltine lightly, but with his eyes upon June.

"The Father Abbot cannot refuse access to a Queen," said June, curtsying, and for an instant she returned his glance, but hers was angry.

"Then only a Queen may outrage the proprieties," laughed her Majesty.

June stood mute; Mr. Craven bit his lip; the alderman tittered. Caroline of Brunswick released the arm of her cavalier. Without so much as a bow he walked back to the house. The polished Mr. Craven seemed to hold his breath at this thrust of the Queen at herself.

Into her face came once more that old look of a child that is put in the corner.

"The Father Abbot is shocked," she said pertly, but the hardness in her face was quite gone, for the anger in June's eyes against the Irishman pleased her. She took her hand and began to speak of her Shakespearean projects with strange parentheses, indicative of good humour.

"A comedy, of course; there has been tragedy enough. Will you be Celia to my Rosalind, Lady Ibbs? Oh yes, I know what Mr. Erin will say—that I must not wear a spark's clothes. I know so well why you looked at him just now. That is just how he makes me feel. *Mein Gott!* is he not exasperating? That reminds me that the alderman has made him very angry. Do you know why? Money, I suppose. I shall go and live in a cottage if the Parliament does not make some arrangement soon. Will you mind a cottage? We will have no men at all about us, tiresome creatures. We will be all shepherdesses and live on curds."

"Your Majesty," interrupted the alderman, "is welcome to any hospitality I can afford, and you know it, madam; and though I would not deprive Lady Ibbs of any rightful privilege from her nearness to your Majesty's person, I am yet eager to offer to fill the place of the Parliament as your Majesty's banker so long as you will permit it."

"So? You, Lady Ibbs?"

June stumbled out an answer. The Queen stood astounded. She put out an eager hand, then drew it back. Her face became cold.

"You have been more than generous," she said, "but Mr. Heseltine did very wrong not to tell me. The Queen of England is a beggar indeed, friends."

She swept into the house.

The mood did not last, but she sent for her bursar and her secretary.

June formed her decision at once. When the Queen summoned her she made her application for temporary dismissal steadily.

"Do you want to leave me?" said the Queen, bending forward from her great chair.

"Only because you do not need me, madam."

"No, no; I mean, do you wish to go away?"

"Yes."

"I wonder why you have been so good to me?" said the Queen slowly, as she took June's hand.

The girl's eyes begged for release.

"I cannot repay," said the Queen, "you have made me humble. But I cannot accept it now. I have accepted Mr. Wood's support. The poor dear citizen has worked so hard for me. If it makes him a little vain, what does it matter? *Mein Gott!* he is the first man who will have won any fame through me. You will come back to me, June? You dressed me for the House of Lords. Will you not help to put on my crown in the Abbey?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE LADY BY THE SEA

By the surf of Atlantic rollers, upon the granite-strewn fells of Cornish heights, our Lady of the Regency communed with herself. She shrank at first from recognition. She would hardly take up her abode at the huge stone Elizabethan house that had witnessed the yokel orgies of the late Lords Ibbs,

and had lain so long shuttered and dead. But her bailiff, who had only set eyes upon her during the short hours she had spent with him ere her departure for Italy, received her with pomp. She drove through the little Cornish town quickly. The news of her pallor and her beauty touched the hearts of her neighbours, and those employed on the estate were astonished to see her up with the sun, and eagerly inspecting all details of the work that went forward. She threw herself headlong into the business. Morning, noon, and night, she visited her tenants. No weather stopped her. She climbed steep hills to see her shepherds—stern-faced men, yet not without a solemn joy in the grand solitude which echoed their Wesleyan Psalms. She listened gravely to tales of wreckage and smuggling, and put off the evil day when her own hand should send half a dozen sinners to Exeter Assizes.

One day, in response to the urgings of the steward, she consented to have the state wing of her house set open to the air, and followed him through its windings, more amused by the pride in the man's face, and the entreaties of his assistant that she should restore the cornices and hangings to their old grandeur, than curious to see what was behind each massive door. The tapestries in one room pleased her roving eye. The monogram worked into them was different to those in the other draperies. The steward explained the "C." as Charles, and understood that "Rex" stood for King, and related how, when the old lord of the house came of age, his father had invited the late King George, while at Devonport, to pay him a visit and grace the festivities. He fell deeper into reminiscences, and told how a skilful upholsterer from Plymouth was about to contrive altering the "C." into a "G." with his practised needle, when all of a sudden news came of a scare that Dutch vessels had been sighted off the Nore, and the King had set off at half an hour's notice for Westminster, to call a Cabinet.

A thought flashed through June's brain. Was that dust or mildew in the tapestry? The man in answer drew out the great bed hangings on their rods and set open the window. Then he beat the folds solemnly with his cane of office, which, from a quaint sense of formality, he had assumed, together with a livery only used on special occasions.

The dust rose. It was as golden as the dust of that emery powder at Castle Curragh, she thought. Then she pulled herself resolutely away from the thoughts that surged always behind an invisible grating in her mind, and came back to practical matters.

"'C.R.'—the Queen's initials," she said, and flashed a meaning look upon her servitor. He beamed.

He went round the room, showing inch by inch where a fraction of trouble and a few pounds would restore its magnificence, for he was as eager as any child, and would not let her escape till she had signed an order for wholesale refurbishment.

June went out on foot, and sat upon a headland that overlooked one of her garden coves, which were washed by the sea, and thick with flowering bushes. She turned her eyes away from the flowers, for she won a curious strength from the black headland, a veritable Cornish lion couchant, of which the rocky claws gripped and tore the foam, and flung it back upon the wayward currents that set out like silver snakes to the open peacock sea.

Her eye fell upon a ruined shelter for fishermen many feet to the left. She pulled out her tablets and noted it. It was only one of many things which must be set right. For nearly a month she had been working with her servants to check these matters. She gave a tired sigh when she saw how much yet remained to be done, for her schemes were wide-reaching, and the bailiff complained that she spent all her time upon repairing the sheds of the poorest, and would not see to her house or gardens, or her private roads.

"It is hard work for a lady," she overheard him say to one of the farmers; "it is a man's business, and hard at that."

How well Stephen Heseltine could advise her! But she would not write to him. When the state rooms were ready she would write to the Queen and say that "the convent was ready, if her Majesty would deign to honour it awhile."

The next stage that rolled into her seaport town brought her two letters from the Queen. One had been delayed, for it breathed hope and ambition and a reckless pertness:—

"The planks for the stands in Parliament Street, which will be built for the loyal people who will see justice done to me, are being sent by river to Windsor. The barges pass here every morning—Willikin has counted twenty in two days. My Spouse is, of course, very busy; but he has received my two letters, for I made Mr. Craven swear to deliver them himself. I have also heard from the old Lord Hutch., who still dances round the bush and will not commit himself, but promises a full reply."

But the second spoke of illness and depression:—

"I am so tired of it all, my dear, and I wish Providence, who, they say, does guard us all, would wind up my husband to say 'Yes' or 'No.' Then I could *tout simplement* know where I was, and I would just as soon go to the Land of Nod to my darling dead Charlotte as sit with a painted smirk on my face at the Drawing-Room."

Then a postscript :—

"Do come back. Mr. Keppel has just come in to say *the date is fixed*. You give me courage, and I am afraid the rest may fail me, all except Madame la Citoyenne, who ordered a French dress from Paris a month ago for the Grand Occasion. In it she looks like a pink cheese in a valance, but if she did not wear it, I should die of boredom and sorrow. So Providence does really seem to think sometimes of

"C. R."

There was a brief word from Heseltine, too :—

"The Queen has talked of you for a week. She asks me to write and urge your return, though I assure her that I cannot influence you."

What ridiculous stiffness made him say that? June crumpled the letter and threw it away. Some hours after she found it again, her fingers trembling with the desire to send a cold answering shaft of pride. She found she had not read it through.

"I am glad you have been away these weeks," it ran ; "the complications have been interminable, the alderman bellows, and the Government is deaf. Wood will listen to no reason. Come and help us, for whatever happens it is not men-at-arms that the Queen needs. She has those in plenty—myself and others ; she needs women of flesh and blood. I would come down to you and bring you back by force, but you cannot be treated so. You must be left to choose."

She looked in her glass and saw that joy had come back. She wrote a short letter to the Queen, and sent a message to Heseltine, still shutting her thoughts behind their grating.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DOOR CLOSES

FOR her own reasons, Lady Ibbs, on her return, chose an independent residence in London, but spent her days at Hammersmith. Stephen Heseltine offered his escort at night to her hotel in Mayfair more than once, but it was always done at the point of the Queen's urging, and was always refused. Whenever he entered the Queen's presence, June left it under some clever pretext. In a short time it became a point of honour with them to differ always, save in matters immediately concerning the Queen's honour and welfare. And even so their councils of war were not held with the old enthusiasm. A sudden fear had gripped her lest she had laid too much of her life open before him. She knew in her brave moments that this was a base thought, for there is no shame in giving ; but there is only shame in being a curmudgeon who reins himself in so tightly that he will not even let you guess whether he loves sweets or abhors them, while he reserves to himself the right to criticise the very springs of your existence, and ventilate the motive which leads you to rise early or late.

Heseltine felt this retreat, and took it as a sure sign of the regret of a frank nature. To be possessed with thoughts of one woman was so new a condition to him, to turn continually inwards and let the thoughts of his own favour or disfavour in the eyes of another come between him and the daily drudgery of the service of a reckless, feckless, saddened woman, was so surprising, that he fell back into humorous cynicism. Yet he in turn quizzed himself for that weak refuge, and held out many an olive branch, which June refused to see. Mr. Keppel Craven and Sir William discussed her often, and the younger man spoke of her with unfeigned admiration before the rest. At the sound of her name, Heseltine found himself always listening. Sir William and the other compared notes as to her responsiveness.

"She has a perfect understanding of all that a man says," cried Mr. Craven, into whose dreams of political service she had entered with vivacity and sympathy.

"Ah!" sighed the "Anacharsis" of many Regency epistles, "I think she is all too complaisant. She looks at you with those serious eyes, listens, flashes a light upon your stumbling path, inspires. For that moment you are the only man in

existence. But the next morning she is all grave impersonality again. You cannot call her cold at any time, but she raises her veil out of mere courtesy and Christian sisterhood. 'Tis enough for Heseltine"—he clapped the Irishman on the back—"but 'tis hardly enough for weak mortals like ourselves, who watch the flight of time with glum looks."

Stephen wondered whether this man of the world had indeed gauged June better than he himself. It did not help him to think so, though he closed his teeth upon it. The joy of combat, which had deserted her, had left him also spent, and he set his face towards a life of new labour in which he should be free. Never till the eve of the great Coronation Day had he felt himself pinioned by the fealty which he had sworn with the full knowledge of all the sacrifice that lay behind it. But now he lived as in a prison-house, and the Queen whose honour he loved loaded him daily with new chains. She, who in counsel with her advisers would adhere firmly to her resolution of making appeals for the renewal of her regal rights, would suddenly thrust away the notion in private talk with him, and challenge him to plead the value of the sovereignty which in the abstract he despised. These things he could answer. He could parry her personalities. Her mere imperiousness he could meet with an independent composure, before which her moods dashed themselves in vain. Her challenges he answered with playful irony; but no skill availed him when in her wild recklessness she would draw June's name into their talk, and by look and jest try to draw from him praise or blame of her. Since the day when the Queen had pitchforked their names together on the lawn, while the alderman tittered, she had not ventured to risk an open encounter; but when the two met or spoke, her gay voice joined in with some garish raillery that turned June to stone and made Heseltine wince. But it was for her sake he winced, and he would have levelled the wall between them at a blow, but that she whispered sternly, "Are you still blind? Have you forgotten what I told you at Leghorn?"

So the Queen stood between her servants, once more a gaoler with honourable prisoners who are his daily sport.

The barges passed and repassed the Queen's house, and went up river empty. The day of pomp neared, but there came no messenger from the King to crave his wife's presence at his crowning. Her gentlemen spurred from east to west; her letters rained upon Carlton House. She begged for a military escort, but there was no one who would listen to her

and award it. Nevertheless, if she were unflinching at St. Omer, her Majesty was now adamant.

"*How* I go does not matter," she said, "but that I do go is the important thing. Well, well, Punch's wife is nobody when Punch is by, so whether he invites me or not, I will go as a private individual, to see my Punch in his new hat at the Abbey."

She rose at six with the first clang of joy-bells that heralded the Coronation Day. She dressed quickly, while June, as before, put the finishing touches to her head and her laces, stiffly assisted by Lady Anne Hamilton. At eight, two carriages were ready to take the Queen and her ladies to Lord Hood's house at St. James's, the rendezvous for the starting of her small *cortège* for the Abbey. There was some unexpected delay in Mr. Craven's arrival, and in securing a full team of the six white horses she had ordered. She stood looking nervously out of the windows and would have no one by her but Heseltine, just as on that day nearly a year ago when she had gone to hear her name grossly coupled with that of her Italian servant in Westminster Hall. She walked the room incessantly, and turned to fling out her thoughts aloud without care whether she showed herself great or small in Stephen's eyes.

"There was surely a curse upon me," she muttered, "at my birth. It was that I should always go through life as a sham, and that life itself should be for me only a child's feast of painted plaster. In my child's dreams I was terrified by the same thing. It was always I who was a dreaming creature, and the rest real. I used to dream of my companions, the young girls who played with me. They were all real persons about a real Court, but in my dreams I could hear them whisper to each other behind their fingers that I was only a dream mistress, and must be humoured for fear I should suddenly discover I was only a shadow. That was the hardest thing of all—that *they knew*. I used to wake up crying with rage." She laughed heartily. "Oh, my God!" she cried again, "it would be so easy for the King to take my hand to-day, and let me stand near while they crown him. It is such a little to ask. Mr. Brougham is very clever and wise. He say 'De King, by English law, need not crown his consort. No one can compel him.' But it is such a little thing, and it cannot hurt one hair of his head to do it. To look the Court for once in the face, to be blessed by holy men! My God! is it so much for the wife of the King to ask?" She struck her hands together. "Can holy men take away the tortures of a whole life? Tell me."

She went to him and put her hand piteously upon his arm. He shook his head.

"Your Church says so," she cried defiantly. "My wounds are all new again. *Mein Gott!* they will never be healed except——" She choked back the words and rushed headlong into a new phrase. "Love will heal them," she said. "The Church should be all love, but it is not." She laughed. "If all the English bishops had loved me equally, they would not have been divided on the question of my virtue. But your Church will receive me; it will believe my confession. Before the eyes of God, whose lips are sealed, a woman has no reason for lies. If you were a priest, you would *have* to believe me."

She neither waited for answer nor retort, but murmured on: "Ah! I wish it were all over—this show to-day, and the need to keep a smile upon my face. Afterwards I will go to a little quiet house in the deep, deep silence of the pasture lands, where you can read to me out of the books your priests use. I have some of them. Lady Ibbs has taught me the English to the Latin in them; but she cannot teach me like you. We quarrelled, she and I. You know, my friend, it is I who quarrelled first, because I could not understand something about purgatory. I say, 'Why have a purgatory?' She could not tell me. I do not see why you Catholics make *étages* in the future life, like a child's Dutch doll's-house."

"You put to me hard questions, madam, and I can but give you the old answer—that as the ages go on it is the heart which forgives those things that the brain cannot accept. In the true religion you find more love than doctrine."

"That is what Lady Ibbs said. I say to her, 'How do you know?' Fie! it is your wisdom she——"

A servant knocked. The carriages were ready. She took up her old murmur:

"To be really Queen—the thing itself! Not a shadow, a doll in whom no one believes!" She drew him back on the threshold to speak low and gaze into his eyes. "Only once have I felt myself really Queen. It was when your lips first called me so in the doorway at Leghorn."

His horse was waiting and impatient, but he would not mount it till he had put June into her carriage—the last of the three. He saw that she had laid aside her mourning. The whiteness of her dress showed her eyes like gentians, and gave to her slightness a new breadth and presence. Her face, under its unwonted flush, was set in determination.

"We must cut through the enemy's lines," she said with her old zest; "we must bear ourselves well as the King's lieges—however poor a puppet that King may be—and as the servants of the Queen."

She put out her hand to him. He mounted with a riotous carelessness of the outcome of the day, and took his place with Mr. Craven by the Queen's coach. June almost accused him of vanity as his horse curvetted, but his lithe figure and his face as he passed made a picture which she would not easily have foregone.

Lord Hood, Lady Anne, and the alderman completed the party in the second carriage; Lady Hood in her own coach led the way, for she had a seat assigned to her in the Abbey, and it was judged that her entry would make that of her Majesty the easier, since no official place had been destined to the Queen in the vast congregation. June drove last. The three coaches and the riders in attendance maintained a close order up to Whitehall between lines of soldiers, but here Lady Hood's coachman was forced to turn into a side lane to quiet his restive pair. At Parliament Square a counter-stream of Guards obliged a halt. The troop marched past, and after it came "The Duke." He sat as he had sat at Waterloo or Enghien, or when he rode daily to the House for the hearing of the Bill of Degradation—straight, and with a slight smile on his lips and a quick salute for all. Then followed the Duke of York, whom the Queen's gentlemen greeted; but his Grace saw it not, though he knew who sat in the coach with six white horses, for a look of fear and annoyance convulsed his features. Then the Duke of Sussex came laughing, and his hat was never on his head. He passed close to the Queen's coach, which stood there a little way from that of Lady Ibbs. The two were isolated, while the soldiers pressed back the folk who could not pay fabulous sums for a niche in the wooden stands on which the July sun beat without mercy, even though ten was but just striking. His Royal Grace of Sussex made a swerve as if he would have ridden up to the carriage; but his intention changed, though he halted to give his sister-in-law a special salute, at which the crowd cheered. Excessive jubilation was, however, still held in reserve by the mob; London was out to see a pageant, and was impatient of any obstacle. There was a far louder huzza when people caught sight of feathers and orders and jewelled necks that flashed through Storey's Gate.

The coaches went on at a foot's pace, and fell into line with

those of the King's guests—my Lady Jersey, high-roused and glittering; my Lady Hertford, with a bunch of scarlet plumes like a Mohawk's on her head; the Hamiltons, and Hollands, and Cecils, and Devonshire's handsome Duke, and many another, all amid the gabble and uproar and the ringing of Westminster chimes.

Heseltine cantered back to give June's coachman an order, and immediately both carriages turned to the left of the square, and broke from the great *queue*. The Queen's coach drove up to a solid wall of soldiers, along which a mounted officer rode to keep order. The coachman drew up in perplexity, for this human barrier, which had opened but a moment to admit Lord Londonderry in his splendid robes of the Garter, had closed up like a wall with a secret panel. The officer asked for a pass. Only when Lord Hood showed the ticket of an ordinary guest were the coaches admitted into a great semicircle of soldiers in front of the north entrance. Here a fresh cordon drew across the Queen's path; but, seeing a difficulty, she alighted, and begged Lord Hood to take her on foot to the great west door. The official here in charge raised his hat, but suggested that the smaller entrance was open to her Majesty. Lord Hood grew impatient.

"It is the Queen. She needs no permit. This is the quicker entrance."

The official insisted, and the group turned back; but the press was now so great that it was impossible to face it on foot.

"We must go back to the west door," said Lord Hood.

June followed in the wake of the alderman, to whom Lady Anne clung. The duenna's disgust at her own condescension, and her terror of being in a crush, made such a hash of her stately features that at any other moment the sight would have been delectable, but now June's heart hammered with such distrust of the issue that her one cry was for Heseltine. Where was he? She had seen him last on the skirts of the crowd, still on his horse, in parley with a soldier.

Lord Hood's firm voice once more demanded admittance.

"Do you not know your Queen?" he fumed.

The crowd pressed forward eager for sensation. There were a few "God bless you's" while the men at the door wrangled. Suddenly the scarlet semicircle broke. A gentleman in the uniform of Carlton House darted forward, and threw himself between the Queen and the soldiers. He lifted his hand as a signal, and the troop behind him closed in, but not before some twenty of the mob had burst into the ring after him,

eager for entry. Her Majesty, frightened, drew aside from the hubbub. She gazed speechless at the man who faced her. Anger and terror blanched her. Stephen Heseltine's voice leapt out somewhere from behind a wall of bayonets. Lord Hood took up the word, and turned to give the Queen his arm once more. But she had run back to the door, and now stood, one hand clutching her draperies of grey and silver on her bosom, as if her enemy were tearing at her heart, while the other pressed convulsively the nailed oak of the pitiless entrance. The official fell back confused. Louder clanged the bells, and now the organ inside swelled till the very door vibrated. A roar from the main body of the mob in that portion of the square turned every head towards it. The wall of redcoats, puzzled perhaps by some counter-order, opened for a moment. In that gap a splendid and curious fragment of a panorama was framed. First came the King's herb-woman on foot, with her six maids in their white and gold dresses, and white wands, and then a great coach with outriders and running footmen; and as it passed on to the main gate, the King's face was turned full upon the frightened woman who crouched against the door.

As the mob made a new rush towards the circle about the Queen, the men with bayonets formed again into their solid hedge. The gentleman in the King's livery went forward and spoke to the official at the door, and he slowly paced up the paved footway with a cool stare at the Queen. She shrank and gathered up her dress and passed him swiftly half-way, then turned to look at him fiercely over her shoulder.

June's moment had come. She turned to the onlookers.

"Look!" she cried. "This fellow here"—she pointed to the gentleman at the door—"is a common thief, and in one moment I can give him over to trial. If he wears the King's livery it is either because he has stolen it or because the King is ill-informed. Men—Englishmen—he bars the door to your Queen. See how your Queen stands."

She turned to point, but the Queen had thrown herself shaking upon Lord Hood, and the alderman stepped in front of them. Edward Frewin's face smiled scornfully down upon June. Whatever she might do to his injury afterwards, he had the advantage now. His eyes maddened her as they had maddened her of old. She stood in the gangway and spoke again.

"Up, and turn him away! He is without authority—a common adventurer that hangs about the King."

"Remove her," shouted Frewin to the officer. "She is mad, and——"

She faced him now, and there was but a yard between them, and the mob howled and surged forward after her.

"Help!" she cried, as his arm was raised to thrust her down. "A traitor to the Queen."

Those behind the red line heard her with an answering yell and broke through. They fought their way right and left, and some fell under the hilts of muskets. But a portion reached the door. The first few stopped to pummel the official, and were swept aside by the rest.

Pressed on all sides, June could hear nothing, see nothing. She did not know that the Queen had hurried back to her carriage. Then came a sudden loosening of the pressure, and then the sense of being lifted up. Her head grew light, her feet touched no floor. A specious clearness of thought and a blurring of her eyes made her wonder idly if death were coming. She saw for one flash the horror on the face of the secretary as he fell, thrust aside by greedy arms, trampled by eager, heedless feet that had won their way inch by inch since sunrise from the purlieus of Westminster to the threshold of the Abbey.

CHAPTER XIX

LOVE'S TRUCE

IN a moment of dense unconsciousness, during which she sank forward on burning grey flagstones, June seemed to have slept a hundred years. A soldier pulled her up. Arms were underneath her, and she knew that she was being carried. Then the clangour and the riot faded away in a dream. A voice here and there reached her brain like a faint halloo across a ferry in the mist.

She felt the motion increase till the breeze ruffled the curls about her ears. She opened her eyes by sheer force of will, for the lids felt like iron. Heseltine stooped and told her to hold the flap of his vest tightly, and she knew that he rode faster than he liked.

"As firmly as you can," he said again. "This creature wants both hands, the cannon scared him. We are out of the riot."

She could see his mouth set and his arms strained, but she sat up and clung to pommel and mane and smiled into his face. In a couple of hundred yards more the pace slackened.

He could manage the reins with one hand. He threw the other about her again and reined the horse in gradually.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"My horse evidently knows," he said, laughing; "he bolted and set his head for Chelsea. Now"—he slipped off—"I will lead him till I find some decent vehicle to take you home."

She thought the smile in his eyes deeper than it had ever been. Then she remembered the one who stood between them.

"Is the Queen safe?" she gasped.

"Yes—with Lord Hood and Joan of Arc. I saw them reach the coach."

"We have failed," she said, with a deep questioning glance, as if to say, "What shall be the end?"

"We have failed together," he answered, and his eyes gave her no respite.

"Let me walk," she begged, under the old embarrassment.

The horse found a green patch between straggling river cottages, and browsed.

The whole horror of the tumult set her shaking once more. He spoke to her as one soothes a child. She opened big shy eyes upon him.

"The Queen," she started, "I must go to her. It was my doing. Let us go at once."

"No, no. She hurried away; she lost heart. The whole attempt was a piece of folly."

"Still I must go to her."

"But first you must settle the account of a beggar—myself."

"I have no reckonings with any one," she answered, overtaken by a directness to which she would not yet trust her senses.

"Did I not tell you once that in the years to come one makes humble petition for the very things that seemed so near in youth. My day of petition has come to me."

"The Queen—the Queen," she cried again, and turned away her face, for now she could not mistake him.

"She stands between us no longer. There remains only your pride—unless——"

He would have said "your memories."

She knew the unspoken words. A little tremor passed over her face. He had called her proud. Six years before she had cursed herself for pride. He should challenge her no more.

"If you are a beggar," she said, while she looked at him from under straight brows, "I do not know who would be rich."

"No one is rich who covets what I covet; but that which I covet belongs, before God, to no man. Is it mine?"

She folded her hands quaintly like a Quakeress, and spoke distinctly, leaning a little away from him.

"Is it as sweet to beg as to give?" she asked. "I can but tell you that it is the sweetest thing in all the world to give that for which another waits——"

He came to take her joyously in his arms.

"Not yet," she said, "not yet," and kissed his hand even while she put it back. With her hand in his she pointed to Westminster. "The Queen," she said.

CHAPTER XX

LOVE FINDS REST

THE carpenters were very merry and busy over her Majesty's miniature theatre at Hammersmith, and the costumier waited in an ante-room with a sheaf of fantastic dresses, one of which June presently carried into the gardens for the Queen's inspection. She entered into the matter with some interest.

"That Circassian robe makes my mouth water," she said, "but I shall not play; I feel old and stiff. *Mein Gott!* I wish de dear Denman had not likened me to Octavia. I am declared innocent, but still I am no Queen, and no wife. Dere is nothing left for me but the desert island and the poisoned dagger."

She rose from her chair, laughing in her old bitter strain, and went indoors.

"Come, we will have a dress rehearsal," she commanded.

Half-way through a scene, she laughed and said the comedy was a silly one.

"Come, we will play the little pantomime that we did at Leghorn. It only means rearranging costumes."

Mr. Craven and the alderman toiled to please her. To Heseltine was given the care of the stage accessories. The Queen, as before, dressed herself as a statue. Her face was deadly pale. She had no need to whiten it. They lifted her from her pedestal on to the stage, and the pantomime began. When she opened her lips to sing, she tottered; the roulade died away in a cry.

Heseltine ran to her, and some one let down the curtain. She put her hand to her side.

"The Automaton is broken," she said, and fell back laughing, with blue lips.

For a day she lay in pain. The household was accustomed to these sudden attacks since her fever at Leghorn. On the Wednesday her physician called in assistance, and Mr. Craven posted gardeners and grooms as sentries to prevent the entrance of visitors and the tinkling of bells. In the evening a bulletin was fastened by Heseltine to a tree that overhung the main road.

The alderman patrolled the mansion like its master. He spoke of "the heavy hand of God" with unctuousness. His resignation creaked in his steps; he remarked repeatedly that "Death was a strange leveller of worms and men." His entreaty for a short interview with the Queen was naturally refused by those about her.

On Thursday the Queen rose and dressed herself. She sent for Heseltine, and after he had left her she burnt papers and books far into the night. She tottered to her bed after it, but as the day wore on she grew restless again, and sat in her chair by the window. She spoke of having eaten some poisoned food, and was sure the spasms would pass. They grew sharper at night, and at her moans, poor Willie Austin, who watched outside her door, sobbed openly.

When she heard Sunday's bells across the water she begged for the Sacrament. Heseltine went himself to fetch the curate of the nearest church. He came back alone, raging and bitter, because the priest must first ask the sanction of ministers, since his superior was absent some ten miles.

"Our priests would not refuse a last grace even to a felon," he cried, "but to a Queen these Lutheran timeservers——"

June put up a beseeching hand, and he was silent. The day wore on, and as no priest came, the household gathered in the room next to the Queen, and June read the Church prayers clearly, so that her mistress should hear through the open door. Brunette crept in before they ended, to say that her lady slept.

The bulletin that the doctors signed on Monday remained unaltered at sunrise the next day. Crowds collected under the tree to read it. A messenger from the Duke of Kent asked permission to wait, in case he might carry better news to his master. The Duke of Sussex came himself and grunted back tears while he jerked out his inquiries to June. All day long the white dust beyond the brick walls of the garden was churned by feet and hoofs. But in the face of the Queen who went slowly to her coveted Land of Nod there was no more

poignant emotion at noon than when she sent for Stephen Heseltine as the shadows lengthened.

"Will you come too?" he asked June. "She will be glad now if I tell her——"

"No," she implored, "tell her nothing; let nothing startle her. I will wait for you in the old place under the elms."

As he reached the path to the house, Heseltine turned once to look at the woman he loved as she stood there, small, quiet, with her soul in her eyes and her breast rising and falling in her love and womanhood and sorrow. Then he mounted the stair.

Caroline of Brunswick lay with her face leaning on her hand. She was almost in a sitting posture when Heseltine entered. Her fair hair was knotted as she had worn it at Leghorn. Her lips moved, and the maids and physician bent down for her orders. They left the room, the doctor whispering Heseltine to call him the instant her lips showed any change.

She gave a little sigh of relief and spoke in her old voice when they were gone. Her hoarseness was gone. A delicate colour suffused her face, and she put out her hand. He knelt by her and folded it to his heart as he had done on that other August day a year before. Another sigh escaped her—a fluttering sigh of contentment.

"You believe in me now?" she said eagerly. "No, don't speak. I know you do, but I have to confess many things. I hated you at Leghorn—*Gott!* the memory burns me. I tortured you because my love for you tortured me. How could you know? I made a fool of poor Bartholomo. I made him tipsy with conceit, the poor creature. He wrote me letters—such letters! I burnt them all, or they would have set fire even to marble. He told Sacchi that he adored me, and Majocchi knew it too. La Oldi encouraged it all. When it was too late to prevent Majocchi from knowing it, I did not know what to do. I felt mad. The days and nights went round and round."

She paused for breath, while her hand fluttered to her mouth, and then back to his hold.

"You knew I loved you; but you could not trust me. The night at Leghorn—and Sacchi—do you know what happened? Bergami missed a book that he wanted—a book of some ridiculous rhymes dedicated to me—and he knew Sacchi was about. He remembered it in the middle of the night, and came to grope for it in the *salle* next my room. Do you know where I was that night? I could not sleep, I

was on the terrace alone. I stepped from the long window of the *salle* and the wind shut it after me. Do you know why I went? That afternoon, under the orange-trees, one of the boys who picked fruit for the house had sat with a girl. They were so young, so beautiful! They were so shy of one another that I laughed openly at my window"—she spoke faster and broke into her old accent—"and I frightened dem away, but I sent Brunette to fetch de girl and make her a little present. I could not forget her face and de face of de pretty brown boy, and how he kissed her. *Mein Gott!* I went out dat night and sat on de terrace and wished for youth and orange-trees, and de wind crept through de leaves like your voice."

She ceased, and stirred as if her cushions irked her.

"I was not in de house at all," she said, "and I saw you seal de cabinet door. It maddened me, though I knew you did it because of silly Bartholomo. I did not know dat Sacchi had come back from Pesaro, and so my door was open, and when I heard de noise I thought some one had hurt you. I ran in and went to La Oldi. Why did I not tell you? You made me like ice and like steel, and I loved you. But what is the use of anger now?"

Her head fell wearily back again.

"Will you rest now? Can I read to you? Shall I call——"

Her lips moved.

"Take me in your arms," they said.

He held her so that her whole weight was upon him.

Ah! she sighed, "what peace! How strong you are, Stephen! Your arms make me feel quite well."

He knelt in the same position, brightly smiling in her face. Of a sudden she pulled herself up and cried:

"Oh! Stephen, your pity has been great. But pity has nothing to do wid love. It is a lie when dey say so. Pity is very cold."

She fell back with a little croon. His arms were trembling. The words froze on his lips; but he saw the eyes close happily again as her cheek lay against his shoulder.

"Sleep," he said tenderly. "I watch as of old."

"Dere is no door between us," she whispered. "How blue de sky is, and the sea is out dere wid de red Italian sails."

Fifteen minutes passed. The weight in his arms grew. Her head slipped slowly from his shoulder. She seemed to breathe regularly. She did not stir when the physician crept

in. As Stephen Heseltine laid her back upon her pillows, she put her hand once more under her cheek. Her eyes opened once.

"To dream," she said as Heseltine bent over—"to dream of——"

Her eyes closed. The physician made a sign to him to go. The attendants took their places as before, and he left the chamber with his head bent.

He found June just as he had left her. He stooped, and for the first time took the love from her lips, and by that she knew that the Queen was beyond hurt or pain. They stood, wordless, hand in hand upon the river brink. Music floated to them from a barge which was gay with the flags of some holy sect. The boat drifted nearer. June recognised the banners as among those which had flocked to greet the Queen at St. James's after her victory. The voices were hushed while one of the men prayed. Then another started the Lutheran chaunt again :

Earthly majesty is dust ;
Yet all crowns from Thee do come,
Save her, Might in Whom we trust.

The wind—strangely rough for the early days of August—scattered the words and filled the rough, improvised sails. The elms creaked and swayed, and the dust in the road swirled high in pools. Another gust came, and was overtaken by yet another. The water was black and ripped with sharp lines, and the reeds whistled as they bowed and snapped. The wind roared anew and swept round the house till it found entrance. It shook the casements and hinges and raged through the corridors. Then it slunk away as suddenly. With the last gust the windows of the Queen's chamber broke from their latches, and the door flew open, though no one touched it. And upon the tempest the spirit of Caroline of Brunswick travelled into the night.

June's white throat leant forward from her lover's embrace ; her eyes dilated, her finger pointed to a knoll by the gate. One of the gardeners lowered the flag that flew there.

THE END.

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